Part V

RELIGION, CLASS AND FAMILY

Black Religion. (Library of Congress)

Chapter Fourteen

Black Religion: Core Emphases and Orientations

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In a classic essay on black religion W.E.B. DuBois, probably the greatest African-American scholar of the 20th century, wrote: "Three things characterized this religion of the slave — the Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy." Although this brief but suggestive description captures the dynamic of the Africans' earliest appropriation of evangelical Protestantism on both sides of the Atlantic, contemporary studies reveal a more complex and comprehensive pattern of religious development. From a perspective that includes not only what DuBois called "an adaptation and mingling of heathen rites…roughly designated as Voodooism," but also the later institutionalization of early slave worship in black churches of the 19th and 20th centuries, three dominant themes or motifs stand out as foundational from the first arrival of African indentured servants at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, to the present. They are survival, elevation, and liberation.

It is tempting to try to encompass the entire history of black religion in this country by arranging these motifs in chronological order. In that case paradigms of *survival* — the sheer effort to use religion to stay alive or to keep body and soul together — would characterize the earliest period of clandestine slave worship in the 17th and 18th centuries; efforts to make religion a ladder for the educational, moral, and cultural *elevation* of resourceful individuals would represent the second period — from the 1850s, says Carter G. Woodson, through the "civilizing" efforts of northern White missionaries when they were free to minister to the former slaves during and following the Civil War, to the urban, social service-oriented "institutional churches" of the first half of the 20th century; and finally, the paradigm of *liberation* — direct action on the part of churches to free the slaves, combat racial discrimination, and garner black political, economic, and moral power — would represent the third period: from the Civil War to the end of the present century.

On closer scrutiny, however, this neat chronological order breaks down. One finds these themes entwining and overlapping in various configurations at several stages. For example, a radical liberationist orientation is seen in the religiously — inspired Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner rebellions of 1822 and 1831, while the newly independent African Methodist Episcopal churches of the North were cooperating with groups like the American Moral Reform Society, seeking to elevate life in the antebellum ghettoes of the Northern cities through education and cultural refinement. Similarly, in the storefront Pentecostal churches of the inner city between the two World Wars there was a reversion to the same patterns of emotionalism and other African forms of religiosity that helped the slaves survive the brutality of plantation life in the late 18th century. Thus, albeit, as this essay will show, the chronological

sequence is useful, in the final analysis, it is more accurate to understand survival, elevation, and liberation as major emphases that emerged simultaneously through the entire course of African-American religious history.

THE AFRICAN HERITAGE

It seems incontrovertible that religious traditions brought from West Africa gave comfort and consolation to the slaves as they were slowly acculturated to the new religion of Christianity in North America. In the beginning African traditional religions functioned as a survival strategy for the captives as they struggled to maintain life and sanity under bondage to White people who regarded them as little more than beasts of burden. The first Africans who were transported in the 17th and 18th centuries brought religious beliefs and practices that prevented them from being totally dehumanized by chattel slavery. In their homeland they had shared, within many cultural and language groups, certain ancient ways of life — rituals, myths, wise sayings, and ethical teachings — that had been handed down from generation to generation. Ancient beliefs, folklore, attitudes, and practices provided a worldview — a holistic view of reality — that made no radical separation between religion and life. There was in everyday affairs no consciousness that at one moment one was being religious and at another moment non-religious or secular. There was no sense that certain understandings of time, space, human affairs, or relations between human and divine beings, belonged to science or philosophy rather than to religion, to the life of the mind rather than to the life of the spirit.

We must proceed carefully here. This is not to claim that the slaves and those they left behind in Africa did not perceive the difference between sacrificing a chicken to a familial god and hoeing a garden. We are not saying that Africans did not esteem some men and women more than others because of the special training and knowledge they possessed that could open up the secrets of nature, man, and God. Precisely so. But there was no absolute disjunction between the holy and the profane. What we must understand is that the African perspective looked upon the work of the intellect and the work of the spirit as a harmonious whole, as being ultimately about the same thing. Presuppositions and experiences of the unity of body and spirit, of heaven and earth, was the common privilege of everyone — not the guarded sinecure of intellectuals called philosophers or religionists called priests or specialists in magic and divination.

It may be almost impossible for modern people to understand fully the way of life out of which the slaves came. To do so we are obliged to change our entire habit of thought about the difference between being and doing, between reflection and action, the commonplace, ordinary affairs of daily experience and what we vaguely call the "spiritual life." Only in this way can we begin to appreciate the comprehensive, unitary character of the African consciousness. Of course, some scholars contend that the past was almost completely obliterated for the slaves brought to North America. But let us argue, for the moment, that for those who did remember anything about their former life (and it is unreasonable to suppose that everything was immediately forgotten once they disembarked on the quays of Jamestown or Charleston) there was no separation between religion and life, between the sacred and the secular. Experience was truth and truth was experience. The single entity — what we might call "life — truth," or "truth-for-living" — comprehended the totality of existence. Reality was, at one and the same time, immanent and transcendent, material and spiritual, mundane and numinous.

It would be naive to assume that we are dealing here with some primitive and simplistic stage of humanization. The folklore of Africa, comprising thousands of myths, folktales, and proverbs still being transmitted from one generation to another, is as subtle and complex in its probity as the choicest dialectical ruminations of a Platonic dialogue. As Richard F. Burton writes concerning the excellence of the proverbs of the Yoruba people of Nigeria:

> Surely these proverbs are indications of no ordinary perception of moral truths, and are sufficient to warrant the inference that in closeness of observation, in depth of thought, and shrewd intelligence, the Yoruba is no ordinary man.

Nor were Africans so unsophisticated in their ideas of God that the religions preserved by some slaves in America can be dismissed as grossly inadequate compared with the theological presuppositions of the missionaries. Not only had some been already introduced to Islam and to the remnants of Portuguese Catholicism in West Africa, but their traditional religions were not inferior in insight and coherence to those two faiths. The Nigerian author Chinua Achebe catches the keen wit and profundity of the traditional religionist, Akunna, in a confrontation with Mr. Brown, an English missionary who came to Akunna's village.

> "You say that there is one supreme God who made heaven and earth," said Akunna on one of Mr. Brown's visits. "We also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods."
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> "There are no other gods," said Mr. Brown. "Chukwu is the only God and all others are false. You carve a piece of wood — like that one" (he pointed at the rafters from which Akunna's carved Ikenga hung), and you call it a god. But it is still a piece of wood."
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> "Yes," said Akunna. "It is indeed a piece of wood. The tree from which it came was made by Chukwu, as indeed all minor gods were. But He made them for His messengers so that we could approach Him through them. It is like yourself. You are the head of your church."
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> "No," protested Mr. Brown. "The head of my church is God Himself."
>
> "I know," said Akunna, "but there must be a head in this world among men. Somebody like yourself must be the head here."

Achebe's deftly drawn picture of Ibo life shows the inseparable connection between the soil in which the ancestors are buried, the community, and God. It calls into question all the West's facile assumptions about the childishness of African religion and philosophy. Without it the African arrivals to the New World would have been hollow men and women. With it they were able to survive with their bodies and souls intact for the long and rugged ascent into the 20th century.

THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE SLAVES

Any analysis of African-American religion must begin with two issues of critical importance: the attitude of White Christians toward the Christianization and the abolition of slavery, and the nature of the earliest slave religion. The first recorded baptism of an African in the American colonies occurred in Virginia in 1624, but there was no systematic evangelization until the 18th century. Even then, the colonists were in no hurry to introduce their slaves to Christianity. The English rationalized the enslavement of both Africans and Indians because they were both different in appearance to themselves and because they considered both to be heathens. When it became evident that blacks were becoming believers despite widespread neglect by official church bodies, Virginia was the first of the colonies to make short shrift of the matter by declaring in 1667 that "…the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom."

It was difficult enough to induce a healthy state of religion among the White population. Attempts by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, an outpost of the bishops of London, to encourage planters to provide religious instruction for their slaves were largely unsuccessful, but almost from the beginning some blacks attended public wor-

ship and requested baptism. By the American Revolution a few had become Anglicans, Baptists, or Methodists. In South Carolina, one missionary, the Reverend Samuel Thomas of Goose Creek, reported as early as 1705 that he had given religious instruction to at least a thousand slaves, many of whom could read the Bible and were memorizing the Creed.

Taking the gospel to blacks helped to ease the consciences of the colonial establishment about slavery, but it did not solve the problem completely. All of the American churches wrestled with the issue and, with the possible exception of the Quakers, finally compromised their ethical sensibilities. Bitter contention raged between Northern and Southern churchmen. As early as 1837 there were splits among the Lutherans and Presbyterians. In 1844 the Methodist Church divided North and South over slavery, followed by the Baptists in 1845. The antislavery American Missionary Association virtually split the Congregational Church in 1846. The Presbyterians finally set up Northern and Southern branches in 1861 and a fissure opening up in the Episcopal Church was aborted in 1862 by the refusal of Northern Episcopalians to recognize that any unbrotherly controversy existed. Both the Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches, with some difficulty, were able to maintain structural unity throughout the Civil War.

THE EVOLUTION OF BLACK CHRISTIANITY

During the anguish in the white churches over slavery, the special nature of black Christianity was secretly asserting itself. We do not know when the first slaves stole away from the surveillance of the masters to worship in their own way. Two conjectures seem reasonable, however. First, it must have been early in the 17th century, for Africans would not have neglected practicing their ancestral religion altogether, and the Whites did little to induce them to adopt theirs. Secondly, it is unlikely that the worship they engaged in was devoid of transplanted survivals from Africa. Today most scholars accept the position of W.E.B. DuBois and his contemporary, Melville Herskovits, a Jewish anthropologist, that fragments of African religion actually survived the Middle Passage and the "breaking-in" process in North America and reappeared under disguise in the early religious meetings of the "Invisible Institution" — the proto-church of the slaves. A secular scholar John W. Blassingame has written:

> In the United States, many African religious rites were fused into one — Voodoo. From the whole panoply of African deities, the slaves chose the snake god of the Whydah, Fon, and Ewe. Symbolic of the umbilical cord and the rainbow, the snake embodied the dynamic, changing quality of life. In Africa it was sometimes the god of fertility and the determiner of good and ill fortune. Only by worshipping the god could one invoke his protective spirit.

There is scant evidence that Voodoo or some discrete form of reinterpreted African religion synthesized as effectively with Protestantism in the English colonies as it did with Roman Catholicism in the Caribbean and Latin America. Nevertheless, reports of missionaries and slave narratives show that the African conjurer and medicine man, the manipulation of charms and talismans, and the use of drums and dancing were present in the slaves' quarters as survival strategies, even after conversion to orthodox Christianity. Selective elements of African religions were not easily exterminated. A Presbyterian missionary, the Reverend Charles C. Jones, described what he encountered among the slaves as late as 1842:

> True religion they are inclined to place in profession, in forms and ordinances, and in excited states of feeling. And true conversion in dreams, visions, trances, voices — all bearing a perfect or striking resemblance to some form or type which has been handed down for generations, or which has been originated in the wild fancy of some religious teacher among them.

Mr. Jones warned his fellow missionaries that the blacks displayed "sophisticated perversions of the gospel" accountable only to the influence of African survivals. So impressed was he with their covert resistance to White Christianity that he compared their objections to "the ripe scholarship and profound intelligence of critics and philosophers." Does this sound like African religions in the 19th century were "childlike"?

THE FIRST BLACK CHURCHES

Although Mechal Sobel explains that there was a black congregation on the plantation of William Byrd III, near Mecklenburg, Virginia as early as 1758, the first black-led churches formed along the Savannah River in Georgia and South Carolina in the 1770s, and in the North at about the same time. Immediately following the American Revolution black imitations of White Baptist and Methodist churches appeared in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York City. But in the Sea Islands off South Carolina and Georgia coasts, in Louisiana, and on scattered plantations across the Southeast, a distinctive form of black folk religion flourished and infused the adopted white evangelicalism with retentions of African philosophy and spirituality. A new and implacable African-American Christianity was being created, much less puritanical and otherworldly than its White counterpart. In this regard it is significant that the three best-known slave revolts were led by fervently religious men — Gabriel Prosser in 1800, Denmark Vesey in 1822, and Nat Turner in 1831. Studies of the music of the early black Church show that hidden rebelliousness and a desire for emancipation were often expressed in song. The independent black churches — particularly the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) — were "freedom churches" in the sense that their latent, if not manifest, concern was *liberation* from slavery and *elevation* from ignorance and degradation to a higher status through education and self-help.

David George, who served as *de facto* pastor of an independent black congregation at Silver Bluff, South Carolina, before 1775; George Liele and Andrew Bryan of the First Colored Baptist Church in Savannah during the same period; Josiah Bishop of Portsmouth, Virginia, and other preachers — from 1760 to 1795 — were all former slaves who ministered in hostile territory, sometimes under the sponsorship and encouragement of radical White Baptist preachers. Some among them, like the full-blooded African, "Uncle Jack," "Black Harry" Hosier, who served the Methodist bishop Francis Asbury, and the many illiterate preachers mentioned in missionary reports and other sources, are almost legendary. Many of their sermons dealt with the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian captivity, with stories of heroism and faithfulness in the Old Testament, and with the identification of Jesus with the poor and downtrodden masses. Mainly untutored, but rarely artless, they told "many-a-truth in a joke," as the saying goes, slyly philosophizing about how "God don't like ugly," "everybody talkin' 'bout heaven ain't goin' there," and "the freedom train's a-coming," obliquely reassuring their congregations of the ultimate vindication of their suffering. Moreover, many animal tales, adages, and proverbs that make up the corpus of black folklore were repeated from the pulpit as homiletical devices, as one preacher said, to "explain the unexplainable, define the indefinable, and unscrew the inscrutable."

The theological motif of these early preachers was survival by any means possible, but especially by virtue of the supernatural power available to every believer. They were preoccupied with maintaining their people's health, keeping them alive, helping them to retain some semblance of personhood and self-esteem in the face of massive dehumanization. Blassingame has commented:

> One of the primary reasons the slaves were able to survive the cruelty they faced was that their behavior was not totally dependent on their masters.... In religion, a slave exercised his own independence of conscience. Convinced that God watched over him,

the slave bore his earthly afflictions in order to earn a heavenly reward. Often he disobeyed his earthly master's rules to keep his Heavenly Master's commandments…. Religious faith gave an ultimate purpose to his life, a sense of communal fellowship and personal worth, and reduced suffering from fear and anxiety.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN CHURCHES

A somewhat different tradition developed among black churches in the North. Many of their pastors also came out of slavery and humble rural backgrounds. But in the relatively freer atmosphere of the North the theological content of their religion took a different turn. It tended toward the ethical revivalism that characterized White Protestantism during the so-called Second Great Awakening, the phenomenal revival of heart-felt, benevolent religion that swept the nation from 1790 to around 1830. It was more urban, more pragmatic, more appealing to those blacks who were beginning to enjoy a relative measure of the prosperity and greater access to educational opportunities found in the northern cities.

After Richard Allen and Absalom Jones protested racial segregation by walking out of St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia in 1787, they founded a quasi-religious community organization called the Free African Society which was replicated in other cities. In Baltimore, New York, Providence, and Boston, these associations — dedicated to the educational, moral, and religious uplift of Africans — became the scaffolding of the black churches of the North. Immediately following voluntary or forced separation from White congregations, African Americans demonstrated an overarching interest in social, economic, and political advancement by making their new churches centers of civic activities. They were aided by White friends such as Anthony Benezet and Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia in organizing and funding self-help and charitable societies, but their churches were the main engines driving all "secular" enterprise. The primary impulse behind these northern developments was a desire for socio-economic and religious autonomy, for racial solidarity, self-help, and personal and group elevation in all branches of civilization.

Thus, as Lewis V. Baldwin explains, Peter Spencer formed a new denomination, the Union Church of African Members, in Wilmington, Delaware in 1813; Richard Allen, became the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, founded in Philadelphia in 1816; James Varick, the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, founded in New York in 1821. These men, together with Absalom Jones, rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church of Africans in Philadelphia; John Gloucester, pastor of the First African Presbyterian Church of the same city; Peter Williams, Jr., of New York City, the first ordained black priest of the Episcopal Church, and Thomas Paul, founder of the first African Baptist Church, also in New York, were all strong, progressive leaders who, in the first two decades of the 19th century, promoted education and social betterment as a religious obligation. They encouraged their lay people to undertake racial progress programs and activities at a time when public meetings of blacks were forbidden in the South and even preaching was prohibited except under White supervision.

We can speak of these northern church leaders, therefore, as elevationists in the sense that their concerns went far beyond mere survival to racial advancement. Although not a minister, the physician and journalist, Martin R. Delany of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is a good example of the elevationist orientation among the black middle class, which is a fair description of the class status of most black Christian laymen of the period. For Delany education, self-help, a desire for equality and racial progress were rungs on the ladder of black elevation and "the means by which God intended man to succeed." In *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States,* Delany says,

> If, as before stated, a knowledge of all the various business enterprises, trades, professions, and sciences, is necessary for the elevation of the white, a knowledge of them also is necessary for the elevation of the colored man.... What we desire to learn now is, how to effect a remedy; this we have endeavored to point out. Our elevation must be the result of self-efforts, and work of our own hands. No other human power can accomplish it.

The concept of elevation appears by name in black literature throughout the 19th century. Before many of them could properly read and write, black men and women, lay as well as clergy, envisioned a broad horizon of racial uplift or advancement through religion. They were the people who dominated the free black communities of the North and led such causes as the boycotting of goods produced by slave labor, resistance to efforts of the American Colonization Society to return free blacks to Africa, and the promotion of moral reform societies. As the clergy became more distracted by the ecclesiastical responsibilities of their burgeoning new denominations, the secular organizations that they once spawned gradually became autonomous, although still under the parental influence of the urban churches. Such was the case of the American Moral Reform Society and the National Negro Convention movement. The latter first met in a church in 1830 and held seven consecutive annual convocations on elevationist issues. Many of these meetings were attended by liberal Whites for whom they provided an opportunity to continue to have a fellowship with (and, thereby, to exercise subtle control over) blacks that had been made more difficult by the development of separate black churches.

The regional and national conventions devoted to abolition and moral reform also represented the liberation motif that was nurtured by a growing black educated class anxious for upward mobility. In the antebellum period the themes of liberation and elevation were sponsored by relatively wealthy laymen like James Forten, Robert Purvis, William Whipper, and William C. Nell. The most influential among them was the journalist David Walker, whose incendiary Appeal to the *Colored Citizens of the World* in 1829, inspired former slaves like Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown, and "free born" propagandists like Martin R. Delany, William H. Day, and H. Ford Douglass. The elevation-conscious, progressive middle class extricated itself from the control of the preachers early in the 19th century. Its impetus was to come from church-related, but intellectually independent laymen and women — like Paul Cuffee, the Massachusetts sea captain of the late 18th century, Maria Stewart, the great woman orator and emancipator, Booker T. Washington, the foremost black educator and national spokesperson during the last century, and W.E.B. DuBois, the brilliant sociologist and political activist who opposed Washington's more passive theory of racial advancement.

A COMPARISON OF MOTIFS

There is, obviously, an intricate and dialectical relationship between the survival, liberation, and elevation traditions in the African-American community. All three were seminal in the churches of the 19th century and continued into the next century in various configurations and degrees of tension, depending upon the situation that existed in different geographical areas at different times. In the ghetto of Los Angeles, between 1906 and the First World War, the survival-oriented followers of William J. Seymour and other charismatic evangelists produced an unprecedented display of African religious retentions that had lain dormant in the interstices of black rural society for a hundred years. Thus black Pentecostalism matured after having been conceived and nurtured in the "Invisible Institution," but almost extinguished by the middle class Negro churches and "civilizing" White missionaries who followed the Union Army into the South during the Civil War. Holiness or Pentecostalism claimed 34

Black Religion. (Library of Congress)

percent of the black churches in New York City in the mid-1920s. In 12 other Northern cities in 1930, 37 percent of the churches were storefront missions that fostered a volatile combination of survival and liberation hermeneutics. During and after the First World War this distinctive strain of lower class religion, derided and repudiated by the elevation-oriented churches of the established middle class, was radicalized. In the white-hot, purifying fires of its African-like forge, it metamorphosed into various religio-political sects and cults, including blackenized versions of Judaism and Islam. The black Jews and the Black Muslims of the Depression era were, therefore, unique representations of an indigenous, survival-oriented religiosity seeking a new cultural and nationalistic expression under the duress of American urbanization, industrialization, and racism.

Survival-oriented southern migrants, who found a cool reception for their rural folk Christianity among the elite churches of the urban North, were ripe for the messages of Timothy Drew (Noble Drew Ali, founder of the Moorish Science Temple), Marcus Garvey, leader of the quasi-religious "Back to Africa" mass movement of the present century, and W. Fard Muhammad, the mysterious founder of the Black Muslims of America. Although Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) found its validation in a heterodox form of Christianity that synthesized elements of the ancient churches of Egypt and Ethiopia, Roman Catholicism, and the Anglicanism of the British colonies in the Caribbean, the appeal of the other two movements (Moorish Science and Black Muslims) was basically cultic in the sense that their highly charismatic and autocratic leaders attempted to create what were virtually new religions in the black ghetto.

Elijah Poole was the son of a Baptist minister and share-cropper in Sandersville, Georgia, before he moved to Detroit in 1919 and changed his name to Elijah Muhammad. There, as an ardent follower and successor of Fard, he studied Islam. The Black Muslims did

not seriously challenge the older Negro churches until the rise of Malcolm X Shabazz in the 1960s. Malcolm's appointment as National Spokesman and his extraordinary ability as an organizer and interpreter of the faith of Elijah catapulted him into leadership of the disillusioned youth of the black ghetto and the remnants of Garveyism that saw a possibility for the revitalization of black nationalism by being connected with his movement. Malcolm became the "Prince of the Black Revolution" of the 1960s. His assassination on February 21, 1965, served only to increase his influence among important sectors of the African- American community. In 1975, after the death of Elijah, his son, Wallace D. Muhammad, assumed leadership and immediately instituted a radical reversal from the cult of the Black Muslims to the established religion of orthodox Islam — today the second most influential religion in the United States and a strong competitor of Christianity for the loyalty of the masses of black people.

Today if the mainstream African-American churches are only moderately interested in liberation from all forms of oppression, and are mainly elevationist in their orientation, the Black Muslims — now under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan — represent a radicalization of the essentially survivalistic tradition of the underclass that tends, in collaboration with certain non-conforming intellectual traditions, in the direction of black nationalism and the goal of pan-African liberation.

Between the First and Second World Wars the attempt was made by organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.) to realign the survival, elevation, and liberation motifs so as to create the kind of balance and harmony between them that would be conducive for racial progress. It was the experience of black leadership during the era of abolitionism and emigrationism that when one of these themes was either neglected or exaggerated above the other two, the result was that commitment to the biblical God and a spirit-led, evangelical Church, on one hand, and black political, economic, and cultural life on the other hand, fell apart. The center collapsed and chaos reigned. That happened after the Civil War when black churches became excessively bourgeois and bureaucratic, and again during the Great Depression when they lost ground to the cults on one hand, and to the N.A.A.C.P. and the National Urban League on the other, notwithstanding the effort on the part of DuBois and progressive elements in the N.A.A.C.P. to create a balance of cultural and political emphases. On both occasions the consequence was a kind of racial schizophrenia that left the masses in moral confusion and the middle classes in a spiritual malaise that was powerless to give leadership when relative calm and prosperity returned, and another realignment and new beginning were called for.

Beginning in 1955, it was the genius of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that brought the three motifs or traditions together again in a history-making, prophetic ministry that wedded the deep spirituality and will to survive of the alienated and impoverished masses, with the sophisticated pragmatism and desire for equality and liberation that characterized the parvenu urbanites and the Negro intelligentsia — the "New Negro" of the 1920s and '30s. King embraced all three of these tendencies and created a multi-dimensional movement, inseparable from the Black Church, that set in motion social, political, economic, religious, and cultural forces that have not yet run their full course. Martin King stands, therefore, at the pinnacle of black religious and political development in the 20th century.

King was not alone in pointing the way to a new future, for the Black Muslim minister, Malcolm X, forced a decisive break between moderate accommodationism that compromised the liberation ideology and a form of protest that was truly revolutionary, a form of protest that ultimately radicalized King. But in King was the confluence of all the complex and variegated tendencies and orientations that are summed up in the three motifs of survival, liberation, and elevation. Other leaders were to come out of the sacred ground upon which he stood, yet beyond him lay unexplored heights that could not have been seen without standing on his shoulders.

The publication in 1969 of Union Theological Seminary professor James H. Cone's thunderous challenge to Euro-American theological scholarship, *Black Theology and Black Power,* made room for an alternative strategy for the Black Church and an intrusive new, unruly tenant in the racially segregated halls of academe. This method of theologizing had not been altogether absent during the years before King, but had brooded in the shadows outside the mainstream black denominations and the ivy-covered walls of their church-related schools and colleges. Cone's first book gave a name to this neglected and ignored stream of African-American religious thought that probably came into existence when the first slave tossed all night on his straw mat, wondering why he was expected to believe in a God who ordained all blacks to perpetual bondage. The name given by Cone to what he found pulsating just beneath the surface of King's more conciliatory Social Gospel, to the religious first cousin to the Black Power philosophy enunciated and popularized by the young civil rights revolutionary, Stokely Carmichael, and the militant black sociologist, Charles V. Hamilton, was "black liberation theology."

Before the end of the 1960s the liberation theme had once again regained ascendancy and proliferated far beyond the black ghettoes of the United States. Liberation theology took root among oppressed *campesinos* and *barrio*-dwellers in Latin America, among black Christian leaders in South Africa, and, in the United States, among White feminists and black womanists (the term adopted by black women to differentiate their more lower class, rebellious, down-to-earth feminism from that of the triumphant White middle class women who, in many instances, continue to be racists). The liberation theme rapidly became a major topic among theologians on both sides of the Atlantic and in ecumenical circles such as the World Council of Churches. But since 1967 the discussion has not been limited to seminaries and church councils. In that year a small but belligerent movement for black religious power and social transformation broke out under the aegis of a new coalition of African-American church executives, pastors, and academics that called itself the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC) — a northern version of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The watchword in important segments of the African-American religious community was *liberation* — which meant freedom from racism, poverty, powerlessness, and all forms of White domination. Liberation became a theological code word for the indigenous religious genius of an oppressed community. On their part, African-American theologians, freed from dependence upon priests and preachers, and deference to ecclesiastical politics — even within the Black Church — began to teach and write a revolutionary Christianity that originated with Jesus, whom they called the Black Messiah. Jesus was the Oppressed Man of God who challenged the hypocrisy of Jewish religion (recapitulated in both White Christianity and a contaminated Negro religion) and the unjust power of the Roman state (recapitulated in the worldwide political and economic hegemony of American capitalism at the end of the 20th century).

CONCLUSION

Throughout their history African-American churches have struggled to hold racial advancement on the political, economic, and cultural front and "winning souls for Christ" in a precarious balance. Generally they have refused to have one without the other. Social action and evangelism were complementary. This enabled the churches to do three things: first, to help the race survive, i.e., to hold body and soul together against the atrocities of White racism; second, to help the race free itself from legal slavery, economic exploitation, and the curse of second class citizenship; and third, to elevate the young and the masses to a level of moral and spiritual integrity that ennobled both the individual and collective life of the community. Today that community is in crisis partly because material interests — the undisciplined desire for money and pleasure — has overridden the values of the Civil Rights era

which deepened spiritual commitments and opened up new material opportunities for the black middle class, and partly because the Black Church, seduced by an evangelical backwardness that is not native to it but was borrowed from conservative White Christianity, by an anti-intellectual emotionalism, and by a sterile and sometimes exploitative ecclesiasticism, has lost the balance between the historic pillars of black religion — survival, liberation, and elevation. The disequilibrium of these motifs meant the loss of the black church's true external mission and gift to American society, and at the same time, the loss of control over and the trivialization of its internal mission to itself and African-American culture.

In consequence, the holistic character of black religion was fractured after King and Malcolm, and both the Black Church and black culture, previously inseparable, lost that essential connection they require. Today they find themselves, in the first instance, in the throes of a severe crisis of faith; and in the second instance, in the grip of a crisis of meaning; a disjunction and corruption of worldview and ethos.

These crises cannot be solved by encouraging "the classes and masses" to repudiate religion as anachronistic, or by black scholars like Jawanza Kunjufu pretending that a transient youth culture that glorifies volatility, that disregards serious commitments, and that calls black women whores and bitches, is authentic African-American culture. To undermine black religion by alleging its mystification, and to trivialize African-American culture by denying its historic roots in the Black Church — is only to deepen the crisis, not get rid of it. Historic black faith has nothing to do with the posturings of black preachers who ape White televangelists, anymore than Hip Hop and New York City lifestyles represent black culture at its best or have much to do with the rich deposits of black folk wisdom in the souls of black folk, African religious retentions, and African-American intellectual traditions from David Walker, for example, to Toni Morrison, the prize-winning novelist of black culture.

Perhaps the time has come for the next generation of African Americans to reassert the great tradition we have been examining; to insert values that are truly Afrocentric; to rescue the inheritance of Martin and Malcolm — the strategies of survival, liberation, and elevation — from moral and spiritual debasement by children who never knew them and who, shamefully, have never been taught the truth about who they are, from whence they come, and how they fell into this sorry plight.

This is one of the goals of black theology. If the Church will return to basics and tap once again into that ennobling and enlightened strain of religion that brought African Americans through the Civil Rights period and helped them amass a modicum of Black Power, perhaps the crisis of these closing years of the 20th century will be surmounted and they can go into the next one with integrity and hope. Martin King anticipated this possibility. Indeed, it was a part of his dream — an embracing of enduring values, a profoundly religious reorientation, a rejuvenation of the spirit of blackness. This seems to be what he envisioned when, at the end of *Where Do We Go From Here? Chaos or Community,* he wrote these words:

> This is our challenge. If we will dare to meet it honestly, historians in future years will have to say that there lived a great people — a Black people — who bore their burdens of oppression in the heat of many days and who, through tenacity and creative commitment, injected a new meaning into the veins of American life.

On the threshold of the 21st century, the direction of black religion in America defies any easy prediction, but the dynamism of the African spiritual inheritance, of which it is the historic expression and primary carrier in the West, is likely to preclude its total secularization in the foreseeable future.

Table 14.1

African-American Church Membership, 1936

Negro Baptists	3,758,065
Colored Primitive Baptists	43,897
African Methodist Episcopal	507,248
African Methodist Episcopal Zion	411,461
Colored Methodist Episcopal	267,148
Colored Cumberland Presbyterian	10,668
Lutherans: Negro Mission	8,813
Total	5,007,300
U.S. Black Population, 1930	11,891,143

From: Frazier, **The Negro in the United States***, pp. 349, 353.*

Table 14.2

Membership in Major Black Churches Since WW II

	Early 1940s	Early 1980s
National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.	4,022,000	6,300,000
Church of God in Christ	300,000	3,710,000
National Baptist Convention of America	2,352,000	2,500,000
African Methodist Episcopal Church	869,000	2,210,000
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church	489,000	1,202,000
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church	382,000	719,000
National Primitive Baptist Convention	44,000	250,000
Progressive National Baptist Convention	—	200,000
U.S. Black Population, 1940 and 1980	12,865,518	26,488,218

From: Gerald David Jaynes and Robin M. Williams, Jr., eds., **A Common Destiny** *(Washington, D.C., 1989), p. 174.*

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Chapter Fifteen

From Black Bourgeoisie to African-American Middle Class and Back, 1957 to the Present

Robert Gregg

Scholars disagree about whether the black middle class has received too much or too little attention. Some historians and social scientists suggest that it is lower-class blacks who have been ignored and that most studies of African Americans have focused on a culture that represents a black bourgeoisie. Other scholars, however, maintain that little systematic study of the middle class has actually been undertaken. In fact, a strong case can be made for both positions. In the United States economy and society there have been fundamental transformations that have led to the development of a new African-American middle class very different from the "Black Bourgeoisie" described by E. Franklin Frazier in 1957. Consequently, the older studies of black bourgeois culture, plentiful though they may be, are no longer sufficient to describe this new middle class.

A glance at the collective output of African Americanists reveals that greatest emphasis has indeed been placed on the lives of middle-class intellectuals, politicians, and other leading members of the black communities and on those organizations that they have created or participated in — from protest organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League, to the churches, the fraternal orders, and the historic black colleges. By contrast, black trade unionists have received little attention and black domestic laborers even less. And yet, a second look at this same literature reveals that many of these institutions are not analyzed in terms of their class but are instead described as "race" institutions. While they do indeed appear to have had "bourgeois" characteristics, what actually made them bourgeois — whether it was the composition of their memberships or just the cultural practices they engaged in — has not been made clear. Indeed, scholars assume, implicitly or explicitly, that these institutions represent the middle class, and the actual nature of the black middle class — its economic, cultural and political bases, its internal divisions, and the degree of its separation from the rest of "the race" — has not received sufficient attention. Consequently, the notion of a black middle class has remained a cultural concept representing almost all black cultural initiatives; it has seldom been used in an economic way to denote a particular socio-economic grouping.

During roughly the first half of this century, culminating in E. Franklin Frazier's 1957 study, *Black Bourgeoisie,* such a cultural approach was not too inhibiting or inappropriate. Black communities did indeed seem to cohere around a particular culture, which, although divided along the lines of race, class, and gender, maintained bourgeois aspects — promoting self-help, uplift, sobriety, and so on. While this remained true until mid-century, by the 1930s a new and more economically-based middle class was already beginning to emerge. At

first this class could speak for the community as a whole, in the process making significant contributions to the Civil Rights movement; but soon it became too economically differentiated from other African Americans to continue doing so. The earlier black bourgeoisie was comprised of people, who, in spite of familial, political, and social ties to other African Americans in the rest of the black community, saw their economic privilege arise from distinct cultural practices. The later class of professionals and civil servants derived their position from their greater incomes, which increased social distance between themselves and the urban poor but which also gave the appearance of a difference in cultural practices. The new threat to this class's viability, which will be outlined below, has led to a renewed emphasis on culture and behavior because, while economic opportunities seemed to account for the growth of the class, those people who manage to retain their position within it will do so, in part, because they follow a particular code of behavior.

Frazier caught the new class in its infancy, and to some extent this explained the harshness of his criticism of it. The class was not large, so that its members' pretensions to status appeared to be nothing more than fanciful or wishful thinking. It was not separate from the remainder of the black community, so its self-image influenced the lives of other African Americans through the organizations that were shared. But in the 1970s and 1980s, an African-American middle class became more distinct, even though it seems again to be vulnerable in ways that Frazier detected almost 40 years ago.

To show this transformation from a bourgeois cultural grouping to a more economically-defined middle class, this chapter will provide a profile of this middle class as it is today, describing its sources of economic strength. It will then focus on the new suburbs, showing how residential patterns for better-off African Americans have changed since 1957. After this, the political and religious tendencies of this new social group will be examined, followed by a discussion of the concept of "escaping the ghetto." These last two sections reveal that even while the new middle class has established itself, this has not meant that its members have been able to move beyond all the concerns and issues of the old bourgeoisie. Racial discrimination as well as general economic decline for the United States threaten the African-American middle class in ways that force its members to consider the plight of those who remain in the ghetto.

A PROFILE OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS

Precisely locating a middle class among African Americans has always been difficult. Is it located around the middling social group among African Americans or around blacks who fit the income and social profile of the white middle class? For African Americans do not necessarily fit within the same class categories that are used for other Americans. While the white middle class is literally situated between the very wealthy and the working class, the black middle class has incorporated African Americans who, if they were white, might have been differently classified. The very wealthy have not been so numerous among African Americans as to constitute a separate class and they have often had familial and social ties to middle-income blacks; the black laborer who holds steady employment, sometimes but not always of a skilled nature, might be considered middle class because of the large number of blacks who are underemployed and living below the poverty line. But while a strict economic definition is still inadequate, in the last two decades it has become easier to detect a middle class located around particular occupational categories, which also correspond more closely to those among whites than in the past. One of the central determinants of middle class-ness had been cultural, and an individual who adopted "bourgeois" culture might sometimes be able to compensate for deficiencies of income. Today, income levels more clearly determine whether or not someone will be described as upper class, middle class, working class, or underclass.

The rapid growth of the black middle class during and after the 1950s was made possible in part by changes in the United States job market in a number of employment areas: government civil service, the armed forces, industrial labor, and universities. These changes occurred in the immediate aftermath of World War II: Local and federal administrations were now forced, either through political pressure from minority communities or civil rights laws, to begin combatting discrimination in hiring, a goal they attempted to achieve by pursuing affirmative action policies, whereby whenever two equal candidates vied for a position, the job would be given to the one from the minority community; under President Harry Truman's leadership, the armed forces established integration and in the process induced the enlistment of many African Americans who believed that their talents would be rewarded more fairly in the military than they would be in other fields; the expanding industrial sector, from the 1940s until the end of the 1960s, provided opportunities for skilled employment for members of previously excluded groups; and lastly, the universities, in the wake of the Brown vs. Topeka, Kansas Board of Education decision of 1954, expanded minority representation on their campuses, either in response to the political demands of the more visible minority students who wanted increased numbers of minority faculty or as a result of new curricular initiatives that led to a focus on subjects previously ignored, subjects like African American or Hispanic American history.

Many of the recent critics of such advances have stressed that given the nature of this transformation and in contrast to the immigrants to America who received no "hand-outs" and advanced by more "legitimate" means, the growth of this class was not something for which its members themselves were responsible. This is a mistaken assumption. While it is true that the aforementioned areas have contributed greatly to the expansion of the black middle class, they could do so once blatant discrimination was terminated *only* because there existed a large pool of highly-trained and educated African Americans ready to fill the positions that began to be opened up to them. The desegregation of major league baseball in 1946 provides us with a model of this process, an appropriate model since the sports leagues have provided many African Americans, though a very small percentage of the total black middle-class population, with the opportunity to rise into black middle and upper classes. While Branch Rickey commenced the first stage of baseball desegregation by bringing Jackie Robinson into the Brooklyn Dodger organization in 1945, he would not have been able to do so, and desegregation could not have been so successful, had not the Negro Baseball League teams nurtured a number of brilliant and often superior black ballplayers. In the same way, the Supreme Court decisions of the 1950s and the Civil Rights laws of the 1960s could not have had the great impact on black employment patterns had not black colleges and universities like Lincoln, Howard, and Hampton, to name a few, already trained a large number of brilliant professionals who could take advantage of the new climate of anti-discrimination. Further, it was many of these same black professionals, (journalists in the case of baseball and lawyers in the case of the Supreme Court decisions), who, by bringing pressure to bear on the white establishment, helped create a climate for reform.

At least until the 1980s, the black middle class underwent a rapid expansion. Between 1960 and 1965 alone, 380,000 African Americans acquired white-collar employment, enlarging the black middle class to about 4 million — one fifth of the total African-American population. By 1980, says Kilson, the percentage of blacks working in white-collar jobs had increased to roughly 40 percent. But around this time, the basis for the growth of the black middle class seemed to come under threat. Whether or not they were racially motivated, calls for smaller government during the Reagan-Bush years were bound to slow the growth of permanent government positions for which educated African Americans could compete. Deregulation and privatization had similar affects, shifting employment opportunities from one section of the economy, where laws about equal hiring were most stringent, to another, where

the whims of individual employers could more easily prevail. In addition, as cities deindustrialized, the private sector shift from manufacturing to service left many skilled and semi-skilled employees with fewer opportunities to earn more. And lastly, with the ending of the Cold War, the closing of many military bases, and the contraction of the number of armed forces' personnel, the U.S. military also witnessed a significant cutback in opportunities for blacks.

Only in the universities have the opportunities remained open to many African Americans, although it has to be noted that attempts to diversify faculties have faced increasing opposition from those who would wish to turn back the clock to a time when universities were not under pressure to increase the number of voices being heard inside academe. Partly, this backlash has occurred because of the severe cutbacks in government funding for education during the 1980s, cutbacks which, while not necessarily diminishing the number of positions open to minority faculty, certainly decreased the funding available to those who might come through university graduate schools to fill the positions. Further, if the decisions in California to end Affirmative Action are taken up elsewhere, this process of retrenchment may be completed. So, even in the universities the black middle class is likely to have difficulty reproducing itself in the future.

Thus, according to *Business Week,* although the size of the black middle class continued to grow during the 1980s, so that by the end of the decade as many as a third of all black families earned between $25,000 and $50,000 — thereby placing them at the low end of the American middle class — the manner in which this increase occurred has not been very promising. As noted by a number of social theorists — Bennett Harrison and Lucy Gorham, in particular — apparent increases reflect, not the expanding numbers of high earning individuals, but rather by the consolidation of wages and more effective "repackaging" of income from wages and rent. In many instances, it was the result of both adults in a family moving into the lower-income levels of the middle class. In fact, according to Harrison and Gorham, the incidence of well-paid black workers actually fell during the 1980s. From one point of view — that of the black women who have seen the significance and size of their wages increase — this change has had some advantages. But from another point of view, it also means that middle-class status no longer depends on the traditional income of the highly-skilled (and not-so-easy-to-replace) male head of household. In these circumstances, the tenure of all work within the new black middle class remains uncertain.

At the same time that the position of many within the middle class has become tenuous, the size of the class of people in the inner-cities, now commonly called the "underclass," has grown dramatically, and the problems associated with it have become more intense. So, while the number of individuals who, on the basis of earning more than $35,000 or about three times poverty level can be comfortably incorporated into a middle class, declined in one estimate by as much as 22 percent, the proportion of African Americans whose earnings fall below the poverty line increased by one fifth. Especially since retention of middle-class status sometimes depends on limiting family size, then, lower-class blacks reproduce and are reproduced by deindustrialization at a greater rate than the black middle class can reproduce itself. African Americans who do climb into the middle class, therefore, do so knowing that there is a strong possibility that they will be pulled back into the ranks of the expanding group hovering around the poverty level.

What members of the black middle class have faced, therefore, is the problem of a shrinking American economy. In this, they have not been alone: the overall proportion of the work force earning poverty-level wages rose from 25.7 percent to 31.5 percent during the 1980s, while the proportion earning three or more times poverty actually fell, from 14.2 percent to 12.7 percent.

African Americans have experienced these problems more intensely than other Americans. Since its overall size has not been increasing at the same rapid rate witnessed in

earlier years, and in many ways its position is becoming more tenuous, then, there is some irony in the increased attention afforded the black middle class at this time. Perhaps the reason for this attention lies in the fact that, like other groups facing external pressures and threats, the members of this class have become more vocal and self-conscious about politics, accentuating a trend, already detectable, towards nationalism.

FROM BREWSTER PLACE TO LINDEN HILLS: RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS

Black middle-class residential patterns have also undergone change over the last 20 years. While earlier "bourgeois" blacks remained close to lower-class blacks and sometimes even continued to live in Brewster Place, the fictional setting for Gloria Naylor's first novel, by the 1980s the African-American middle class was to be found living in Linden Hills, the fictional suburb of Naylor's second novel.

The initial impulse of wealthy blacks had been towards racial integration. In the northern cities this impulse preceded the success of the national Civil Rights movement. As the northward migrations of World War I created large urban black communities, the professional elite, who benefitted most directly from this expansion, attempted to move into the more attractive residential areas within the cities. As suburban tracts developed along the post-World War II highway system, members of this class endeavored to integrate them also.

The experiences of Sadie Tanner Alexander and Raymond Pace Alexander, members of the Philadelphia black professional class who managed to bring about the integration of the Mount Airy section of Philadelphia, were typical of these early integration efforts. Sadie was a descendant of the prominent Mossell and Tanner families, who included among their number the founder of Frederick Douglass Hospital, Nathan Mossell, the world renowned artist, Henry O. Tanner, and many leading churchmen in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. After earning a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania, Sadie studied law and became a leading figure in Philadelphia's black community as an Assistant City Counsellor and a member of the city's Committee on Human Relations. Her local prominence was such that she was chosen by Truman to be a member of his Human Rights Commission in 1947. Raymond Alexander, came from Virginia Baptists and graduated from Harvard law school. After establishing a very successful practice in the 1920s, he became Justice on the Court of Common Pleas in 1959.

Their successful attempts to integrate Mount Airy in Philadelphia are notable for a number of reasons. First, unlike more recent black suburbanites, they retained their commitment to the city. In doing so, the Alexanders retained the strength of their urban power base. Thus, to the extent that they lived next to white neighbors, their home lives could be integrated while their work lives could remain focused on the increasingly segregated black urban communities. Under these circumstances, they needed to respond to the issues of inner-city dwellers and could benefit from doing so. Moreover, while they moved to the outer reaches of the city, they kept their social ties to the rest of black Philadelphia: Raymond continued to attend Zion Baptist Church in North Philadelphia, while Sadie retained her strong ties to the city's African Methodists. Theirs was a complicated lifestyle, using the power of the newly enlarged black community to their benefit, serving that community also, and living and working alongside prominent white Philadelphians.

Furthermore, the experience of the Alexanders was not unrepresentative of most black middle-class city dwellers. The history of black urban communities is replete with attempts by better-off members of the community — ministers, attorneys, physicians, teachers, and so on — to move into previously white-only neighborhoods. Often such attempts were met with open violence from the communities, followed by the "white flight" into other white-only areas. In the process, the black middle class would eventually be drawn back into the surrounding black community, and the experience of integration would only be temporary.

Contrast this situation with the picture of the black suburb in Prince George's County, Maryland, provided by David J. Dent in a June 14, 1992, article in *The New York Times Magazine*. Here we find the black middle class living in suburban tracts outside city limits, wishing to develop a new power base around relatively segregated suburbs, seeing themselves as very separate from inner-city blacks who have not had the opportunity to move out of Washington D.C.'s ghettoized districts. During the 1980s black suburban population seemed to be an ever-increasing group. According to Dent:

> What some consider the essence of the American dream — suburbia — became a reality for a record number of blacks in the 1980s. In 1990, 32 percent of all black Americans in metropolitan areas lived in suburban neighborhoods, a record 6 percent increase from 1980…. These blacks are moving to black upper- and middle-class neighborhoods, usually pockets in counties that have a white majority.

Furthermore, says Dent, these black suburbs have sprung up all over the United States:

> In the Miami area, there is Rolling Oaks in Dade County. Around St. Louis, black suburbs exist in sections of Black Jack, Jennings, Normandy, and University City in St. Louis County. In the Atlanta suburbs, black majority communities include Brook Glen, Panola Mill and Wyndham Park in DeKalb County. And in the Washington area, Prince Georges County itself has a black majority.

In some instances these segregated suburbs developed as a result of white suburbanites' attempts to exclude blacks from their neighborhoods, but for many African Americans the decision to move into a black suburban neighborhood was the result of weighing many factors. By moving, they could reap the benefits of middle-class lifestyles, could stay connected to African-American cultural traditions promoted by other black suburbanites, and, quite significantly, could shield themselves from much of the racial bigotry they would face in white suburbs.

In terms of economic benefits, however, these suburbs have not contributed to the growth of the African-American middle class in the same way that the growth of suburbs did for other middle-class Americans. They have not provided access to "good jobs at good wages" that has historically been part of the process of white social mobility. Clearly, a few black real estate agents have benefitted through the promotion of black suburbs, but their numbers are few, and many white agents have also sold houses in these areas. Also, while suburbs benefitted earlier settlers by giving them access to many of the newly developing labor markets, many of those markets are now spent as industrial concerns relocate to areas where there are large pools of cheap labor. Moreover, some of the service-sector employment that can grow in areas surrounding suburbs — at the malls, in particular — have not been forthcoming near black suburbs. Dent notes, for example, that many major department stores have refused to establish outlets in these areas. Nordstrom and Macy's have opened stores in Baltimore County, he tells us, "which had a median household income of $38,837, compared with $43,127 in Prince George's County. But Baltimore County is more than 85 percent white." Since residents of the black county must drive to other counties to do much of their shopping, money that might have stayed in their community ends up elsewhere, while the jobs are to be found in other counties also. All this has a significant impact on the long term tax base of an African-American county, thus affecting not only present income prospects, but through smaller school appropriations, future funding also.

MIDDLE-CLASS POLITICS AND RELIGION

The increasingly tenuous position of the middle class in America as a whole has important implications for the politics of the African-American middle class. For as the problems of poverty increase and the number of routes out of the ghetto diminish, the black middle class begins to represent an ever-decreasing proportion of the overall black community. At the same time, however, it is becoming more visible and entrenched in terms of political and cultural consciousness. In addition, as Carol Stack has shown, the kinds of behavior that enable a family to maintain its suburban status — behaviors including limiting family size, owning homes, and saving money — are very different from those that are functional to a ghetto community. Consequently, the middle class is in many ways returning to a situation of being more physically and behaviorally distanced from the ghetto, like the bourgeoisie of Frazier's day. Moreover, because its members feel embattled, they are more reluctant than their predecessors to make strong commitments to lower-class blacks and, thereby, to risk being associated with them.

Nevertheless, even this distance does not lead to complete political detachment on the part of middle-class African Americans. In part, this is because the integrationism of Frazier's day has been replaced by a more nationalist spirit which pervades even the middle class, and which assumes an alliance however tentative of middle- and lower-class blacks. Historically, nationalism has been most closely associated with lower-class, urban blacks. Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X were both able to strike chords among an urban poor that was less receptive to the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. Now, and especially since Spike Lee's 1992 film version of Malcolm's life, it is members of the black middle class who will point to the lessons to be learned from Garvey and Malcolm and to question King's integrationism. In some ways, though, this new nationalism, which resembles other post-colonial nationalisms described by Frantz Fanon, is a revival of the spirit of Booker T. Washington, pushing for black capitalism and a United States that accepts that blacks and whites can be as separate as the fingers socially, and as joined together as the hand economically in the corporate work place.

Over the last ten years there have been continual discoveries and rediscoveries of the black middle class. Black intellectuals questioning the value of what they described as the Civil Rights consensus — people like Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, and Stephen Carter, among others — began to be described as representatives of more than just an outlandish strain of conservatism among a small minority of African Americans. They now appear to be spokespersons for a middle class that is undergoing a political shift to the right. Increasingly, the assumption that a member of the black middle class would vote the Democratic ticket, has been found to be unreliable. President George Bush's selection of Judge Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court in 1991, over many more experienced but liberal black judges, represented a recognition of the potential for the Republican Party to increase its support among African Americans. The fact that many African-American church leaders supported Judge Thomas quite vociferously at first, and a little more grudgingly as the Anita Hill allegations were made public, suggests the extent to which Republican political strategists were correct.

To some extent, this black middle-class conservatism has been shaped by the exigencies of suburban life. Perhaps the key difference between the suburban and urban dweller is the difference in family life. Liberal and conservative political positions often revolve around whether the family is a cause or an effect of this difference. Do family values and experiences aid members of the middle class, or does the destruction of families by inner-city experience create this widespread difference in family structures? Whichever it is, the perceived difference orients the focus of political discourse to the nature of the family. As a result, whether or not a member of the black middle class votes Republican, he or she is far more likely than 20 years ago to accept the idea that the problem with inner-city dwellers is founded on the need to develop strong male figures, who can build solid families. In many ways this accounts for the current widespread acceptance of ideas developed by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965

The Black Middle Class. (National Archives)

regarding the black family's "tangle of pathology," ideas which had been dismissed as racist throughout most of the 1970s and 1980s and then were ever-present during the "Million Man March" promoted by Nation of Islam leader Minister Louis Farakhan.

Martin Kilson has provided a nuanced view of black middle-class politics. He argues, in the vein of William Julius Wilson's The *Declining Significance of Race,* that there has been a degree of what he calls "deracialization" and that middle- and upper-class blacks have acquired social, professional, and political attitudes that are based more on class than on race. In this they resemble similarly situated whites. The "deghettoization" of the black bourgeoisie's education and job markets, Kilson argues, "disentangles the new black bourgeoisie from the old." "The difference is fundamental," he argues. "[T]he old black bourgeoisie faced a fierce ceiling on its professional and social mobility; the new black bourgeoisie, while still confronting residual racism, takes over much of the professionalization and mobility dynamics of the white bourgeoisie."

At the same time, however, Kilson maintains, there has been an increasing rage among middle-class blacks who resent racism as much as, if not more than before, because, in spite of all they have obtained, they still face the possibility of racial discrimination and bigotry. Consequently, a new nationalism has also emerged among members of the black middle class.

Two events in 1991 have helped to cement this new nationalism: the aforementioned nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court and the police beating of Rodney King. Judge Thomas's claim that the Senate Judiciary Committee was carrying out a "high-tech lynching" could strike a chord among many wealthier African Americans, who might be, as Thomas was suggesting he was being, unfairly treated because they were both black and successful. An even more powerful symbol of this anger, perhaps, was the Rodney King incident. The arbitrariness of the police brutality in the King case and its clearly racial character, as well as the

manner in which the police defendants were acquitted in 1992, led many middle-class African Americans, many of whom had themselves been mistreated by police forces around the country, to feel that they too could be victimized in this manner.

The effect of events of this kind has been the cementing of what Kilson had predicted would become a dual political approach among many black middle-class people. Whether members of the middle class would support conservative or liberal political initiatives would revolve "around whether social and political issues are viewed as class-linked or race-linked. If viewed as class-linked, upper-strata blacks are likely to respond as conservatives. If seen as race-linked, they respond as liberals." In some respects, however, the complexity of black middle-class politics has become yet more complicated. While there are divisions between liberals and conservatives in terms of voting patterns, with the Democrats remaining the greatest beneficiaries, the politics of race have become less easy to characterize along polarities of left and right. Now race can elicit conservative responses where before liberal ones prevailed. The need to provide for role models for young black men, for example, which in the past would have been seen as a conservative or Republican approach to "uplifting" black people, now is often seen as the remedy by black middle-class voters, though more so among men than women. In short, the class and racial attitudes have fused together so that middle-class and nationalist ideas cannot always be separated as was clear in the support garnered for the "Million Man March."

This increasing complexity is particularly apparent where gender issues play a central role in a particular issue. The Thomas nomination, for example, received far more widespread criticism from African-American women than from men, even when the issue of race and racism became apparent. It has become increasingly clear during the last 20 years — especially as black women such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Oprah Winfrey have become vocal — that there is often more than one way of representing "the race," and black middle-class appeals in this area do not always lead to a consensus. The centrality of the family (at the core of all gender analysis) to the life chances of most African-Americans places women in a key position to influence black politics. While white middle-class women have historically allied themselves with their husbands and brothers on issues of class, black middle-class women have not always done so. Black women intellectuals seldom propose that the problem with the inner-cities is that there are too many single mothers, who are unable to bring up young African-American boys properly, though many will argue that black men should be doing more within the family. They are far more likely to argue that this is still a case of "blaming the victims," and, if not racist, then sexist. While black men and women will often argue that they place racial advancement above their own gender aspirations, moreover, because of the significance of gender roles in situating African Americans socially, their definitions of racial advancement may be quite different.

The religious commitments of members of the middle class also appear to have undergone some transformation over the last 30 years. Between the 1930s and 1960s, African-American churches ceded some of their leadership position in black urban communities to the new professional elite, a process of secularization that clearly pleased E. Franklin Frazier. These professionals, while still often churchgoers, used other organizations like fraternities, clubs, and political parties to organize themselves and their constituencies. And, when they remained in the church, they tended to gravitate towards the more elite denominations, like the Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches. African Methodist denominations, which had been able to represent the black community as a whole, now seemed to represent a shrinking section of the overall community.

In the last thirty years there has been a dramatic reversal of this trend. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, in particular, has shown a complete change of fortunes. While still outnumbered by the Baptists, it has taken on a leadership role in the Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC), an organization that was virtually created by the A.M.E. Church's initiative, with the financial support of foundations who, in the 1970s, were looking for a more conservative alternative to Black Power.

This new strength comes, in part, from the denomination's highly centralized bureaucracy, allowing it to have more influence in the CNBC than the more decentralized Baptist denomination. But, more importantly, it derives from the church's theology, which, by marrying together nationalist (African) and European (Methodist) traditions, speaks to the dual political and religious influences of many black suburbanites. Thus, in Prince George's County, Maryland, the denomination is thriving. The Ebenezer A.M.E. Church, which was formerly located in Washington, D.C., has revitalized itself by moving its congregation out of the city. According to Dent, "Membership at the 136-year-old church had dwindled to fewer than 100 members. Since the relocation from Washington in 1983, membership has grown to nearly 7,000 and donations have provided $10 million for the construction of a new church building." The renewed importance of the A.M.E. Church is apparent in its frequent appearance in national news: It was recognized for its vocal support for Clarence Thomas, it was the first black community President Clinton visited, and Christopher Darden, prosecuting attorney in the O.J. Simpson trial, is a prominent member of the largest A.M.E. church in Los Angeles.

ESCAPING THE GHETTO

The idea of "escaping the ghetto" has been a powerful one ever since modern black ghettos made their first appearance at the beginning of this century. Paradoxically, as the more economically-based middle class has emerged from the black bourgeoisie, the notion of escaping the ghetto has not disappeared. The idea still resonates among members of the African-American middle class largely because the ghetto, or poverty generally, has become so difficult to escape. Except when the problems that lower-class Americans face impinge upon their lives through crime and other social "problems," members of the white middle class are able to forget them and can see no relationship between their own wealth and the poverty of others; black Americans do not have this luxury. In a racially divided society, members of the African-American middle class are constantly pressured to see themselves in relation to poorer African Americans. Even when, in fact, many of them never actually lived in the ghetto, they have managed to "escape" and they must consider the plight of those less fortunate than themselves.

For Frazier the black bourgeoisie had "escape[d] into a world of make-believe," and by putting on the "masks" of the white middle class, its members had found a "sham society" that could only leave them with feelings of "emptiness and futility." This stark judgment was not only harsh; it was also historically inaccurate. While there were times when its members looked scornfully on the poorest members of "the race," the black bourgeoisie had always been forced to focus on and remained willing to champion the cause of all African Americans. What Frazier was seeing in 1957 when he wrote *Black Bourgeoisie* was a change occurring in the ability of blacks to separate themselves spatially from the ghetto by moving into formerly white-only areas of the cities and suburbs. He assumed incorrectly that such migration would, like the "white flight" that preceded it, lead the black bourgeois migrants to forget those that they left behind. The irony is that while white suburbanites did in many respects escape from social reality into a fantasy world that was as temporary as the prosperity brought on by the Cold War and America's unchallenged economy, it was black suburbanites who, constantly in fear of losing their social privileges, were being accused of fantasizing.

In addition to the need to escape from poverty, members of the African-American middle class have a need to escape assumptions that are attached to them because they share a racial background and heritage with many of the most visible members of the "underclass." As mentioned previously, because there are now so few avenues by which to escape the ghetto, many social commentators assume incorrectly that a people whose ancestors were slaves, sharecroppers, and ghetto dwellers could only have made it into the middle class as a result of government handouts. For members of the African-American middle class this means that their efforts are constantly being denigrated and that fallacious assumptions about the limited abilities and

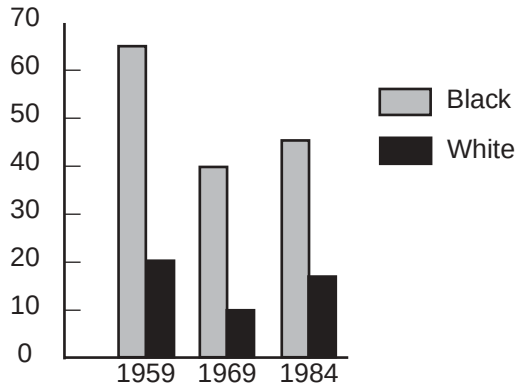
"cultural deficit" of "the race" are continually being brought to bear upon them. Historically, members of this class have confronted this by contesting these assessments of "the race" and focusing on the contributions and achievements of African Americans in different arenas.

Also, because of the nature of suburban existence now shared by an increasing number of blacks, the metaphor of escape for the black middle class remains a powerful one. The idea of the suburb is itself one that is very much associated with escaping the turmoils of modern, urban society. Whether or not the impulse to own a house and a plot of land goes back to the homesteading, frontier origins of the United States, the impulse to move to a suburb, is a more recent phenomenon which coincided both with the rapid expansion of the highway system after World War II and with the arrival of large numbers of African Americans in northern cities before and after World War II. The suburb, then, represents in part an escape from racial conflict. But, given the racial origin of this escapism, African-American suburbanites are constantly confronted by the seemingly contradictory impulses that were found in their politics and religion — the desire to escape and the need to combat the widespread condition of poverty among African Americans.

In the end, the perilous situation for African Americans in today's post-industrial society suggests that the goals of the old black bourgeoisie, the desires to combat discrimination and to uplift the race as a whole, are not significantly different from those of the African-American middle class in the 1990s. For the political and religious aspirations of this latter group highlight the likelihood that the only lasting escape from the ghetto will be achieved by eliminating the inner-city ghettos themselves. As long as industrial decline continues to add to the ranks of the black underclass, and as long as middle-class African Americans are compared unfairly and unfavorably to other middle-class Americans, no escape can be certain and secure.

Chart 15.1

Median Family Income in the United States, 1950-1985



From: Jaynes and Williams, **A Common Destiny,** *p. 24*

Table 15.1

Occupations of African Americans, 1939-1979*

	1939	1949	1959	1969	1979
Black Men					
Professional	1.8	2.2	3.8	7.8	10.7
Proprietors, managers, officials	1.3	2.0	3.0	4.7	6.7
Clerical and sales	2.1	4.2	7.0	9.2	11.1
Craftsmen	4.4	7.8	9.5	13.8	17.1
Operatives	12.6	21.4	24.3	28.3	23.4
Nonfarm laborers	21.4	24.0	22.8	17.5	12.0
Domestic service	2.9	1.0	0.4	0.3	0.2
Other service	12.4	13.5	14.9	12.8	15.8
Farmers and farm workers	41.1	23.9	14.3	5.6	3.0
Black Women					
Professional	4.3	5.7	6.0 1	0.8	14.8
Proprietors, managers. officials	0.7	1.4	1.8	1.9	3.7
Clerical and sales	1.4	5.4	10.8	28.4	32.4
Craftsmen	0.1	0.7	0.5	0.8	1.4
Operatives	6.2	14.9	14.1	17.6	14.9
Nonfarm laborers	0.8	1.5	0.6	0.7	1.4
Domestic service	60.0	42.0	35.2	17.5	6.5
Other service	10.5	19.1	21.4	25.7	24.3
Farmers and farm workers	0.8	1.5	0.6	0.7	1.4

**Percent employed*
From: Jaynes and Williams, **A Common Destiny,** *p.273*

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Chapter Sixteen

The New Underclass: Concentrated Poverty in the Post-Industrial City

John F. Baumann

Hidden among the invisible poor of the other America of the 1950s and occasionally glimpsed during the 1960s by anthropologists studying streetcorner men, America's underclass suddenly emerged as a social problem in the 1980s. By the 1990s America's black ghetto poor were assailed for the defectiveness of their culture; stripped of any semblance of respectability; and "disentitled" to further public assistance by an increasingly hostile and conservative public. The President of the United States in 1995, facing an ultra-conservative Congress, proffered the nation's neediest a bare remnant of the already badly shredded "safety net."

Meanwhile day by day both the film and print media barraged the American public with more evidence of underclass violence and immorality. The political assault on the underclass largely ignored a burgeoning mass of sociological, anthropological, and historical evidence about the nature and causes of concentrated urban poverty. Other than an occasional news magazine article and Ken Auletta's 1982 book that popularized the term "underclass," the issue had simmered on a back burner until 1987 when University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson published, *The Truly Disadvantaged.* Wilson's study, heavily laden with statistical data, attacked Charles Murray's arguments made three years earlier in *Losing Ground.* Murray's conservative potboiler acknowledged — in passing — that African Americans faced racial and economic constraints, but fixed the blame for America's increasingly welfare-dependent, drug- and crime-prone underclass squarely on liberal President Lyndon Baines Johnson's "War on Poverty," which coddled and encouraged rather than punished the loose, criminal behavior of the poor.

For Wilson America's massive post-World War II economic restructuring, not liberal policies associated with Johnson's "Great Society," best explained underclass formation. Between 1945 and 1975 manufacturing all but disappeared from America's old industrial cities, stranding a growing African-American working class in inner cities bereft of economic opportunity. Wilson's underclass research uncovered a vicious set of collateral explanatory factors including the "Great Society's" success in launching middle class careers for a generation of upwardly mobile black males. Unfortunately, those males left behind, he argued, too frequently succumbed to drugs, crime, incarceration, or violent death. According to Wilson, both populations, the mobile black middle class that fled the ghetto, and that portion left behind in jail, jobless, or dead, deprived inner city black communities of marriageable black males, making places such as Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Boston, and Detroit wastelands, peopled by female-headed households frequently housed in socially stultifying high-rise public housing projects typified by Chicago's Cabrinni Green that ironically had been designed to be a model project.

Wilson's sociological *tour de force* offered a terse, but trenchant definition of the underclass. These were families, he explained, socially and geographically "outside the mainstream of the American occupational system." The underclass included "individuals who lacked training and skills and either experienced long-term unemployment or engaged in street crime or other forms of aberrant behavior and families that experienced long spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency." Although Wilson and many other scholars of inner city poverty have since repudiated the term "underclass" as too all encompassing and pejorative, reminiscent of the 19th century epithet "undeserving poor," the term possesses a political-historical resonance and is employed here within that framework.

Modern ghetto poverty contrasted sharply with earlier urban poverty described by novelists, social workers and reporters. Capital and labor intensive, resource squandering, 19th-century industrialism explained that poverty. Today's urban underclass poverty originated in the confluence of modern historical events that especially shaped the recent African-American experience: first, the great city-ward migrations of rural blacks during and following World War I and World War II; secondly, the transformation of a rural-agricultural people into an urban-industrial work force; and lastly and most critically, late 20th-century deindustrialization that rapidly marginalized this new proletariat. The last restructured the urban economies of the industrial cities of the northeast from hives of goods manufacturing into management and technological centers emphasizing finance, information processing, and the delivery of services. In the half century following World War II, this combination of black migration and economic restructuring, plus discriminatory and pernicious local and federal housing policies, trapped huge numbers of the African-American population in dark ghettos devoid of opportunity.

II

In 1965 a young Under-secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, announced his finding that American cities harbored a destructive and uniquely African-American "culture of poverty." Oscar Lewis had introduced the concept in *La Vida* a study of Puerto Ricans in New York and applied to Africans in New York by the great black social-psychologist Kenneth Clark. Moynihan's report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,* spotlighted the ominous rise of the black female-headed household and welfare dependency in the face of national civil rights victories, federal manpower programs, and evidence of rising black employment. He noted in explanation the legacy of slavery and the social disorganization caused by rapid urbanization; but, asserted Moynihan, the fundamental problem "at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro Family." In words deeply repugnant to the black middle class, Moynihan described the black family as a "tangle of pathology," as "the principle source of most of the aberrant, inadequate, or anti-social behavior that did not establish, but now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation."

Black scholars assailed Moynihan's report as a scathing indictment of black culture and denied that his linkage of fatherlessness and deepening poverty represented a pathological condition. Black sociologists quickly charged Moynihan with failing to recognize the great diversity of both incomes and lifestyles among black families arguing that when income level is taken into consideration, black and white family structural differences largely disappeared.

Other social scientists, black and white, remonstrated that Moynihan's "tangle of pathology" ignored the grim situation of black families, black low incomes, and the dysfunctional urban environments endured by blacks. In *Tally's Corner* ethnographer Elliot Liebow had explored the harsh reality faced a group of black males who frequented a take-out shop

in a black Washington, D.C. neighborhood. These were unskilled men whose low pay and lack of self-esteem rendered normal middle-class male roles impossible. In every facet of their lives, as husbands, boyfriends, fathers, or employees, they acted out their failure. Elsewhere, in Saint Louis's notorious Pruitt and Igoe housing project complex, Lee Rainwater discovered a similarly harsh world so impoverished and fearful that it disfigured the identities of its residents and left them incapable of dealing with the larger social sphere beyond the ghetto walls. Defenders of the black family such as Carol Stack and Joyce Ladner never denied the horror of ghetto life; however, they vehemently disputed the charge that the black urban family was dysfunctional and stressed the resilience and adaptability of black families in the face of racism and adversity.

For two decades, the controversy about the normality or dysfunctionality of the black family stifled scholarly debate about persistent black poverty; then, beginning in the 1970s conservative critics, led by Murray, suddenly unleashed a furious attack on black dependency, drugs, and the blight of unmarried, teenage black mothers, lashing out at what they depicted as the grotesque heritage of liberal welfare programs which they charged authored rising welfare dependency, the plague of female-headed households, drug addiction, crime and the other afflictions of the underclass.

Wilson directly engaged their equation of welfare and the underclass. By raising structural issues such as postindustrialism and the mismatch between black skills and the demands of the contemporary urban job market, Wilson attempted to counter conservative claims that the black inner city neighborhoods thrived on federal welfare largess. In *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton modified Wilson's emphatically structural argument. They pleaded that structural forces failed to adequately explain underclass formation in America's aging industrial cities. According to Massey and Denton racial segregation not only seriously aggravated the economic and social conditions of African-American urban life, but is mainly culpable in spawning the modern underclass. The "truly disadvantaged," contend Massey and Denton, are better understood as "truly segregated."

III

Massey and Denton recognized the impact of urban economic restructuring in the shaping of concentrated poverty and they like many other scholars of intractable, modern inner city poverty fully implicate postindustrialism in the underclass equation. At the same time, historians of urban poverty remind us that poverty long haunted free black families in urban America. The urban poverty explored by Moynihan and others was deeply rooted in the African-American experience. Black city dwellers in Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, and Washington, D.C. knew grinding urban poverty long before recent scholars reported on it. In the 18th and early 19th century Philadelphia blacks, free and slave, crowded into the dank, sunless courts and alleys of the city's Southwark and Northern Liberties sections. Prior to World War I manufacturing firms in Philadelphia, Detroit, Milwaukee, and elsewhere barred most African Americans relegating what were then fairly modest black working-class populations to the margins of the northern urban-industrial economy. In Philadelphia, according to W.E.B. DuBois's 1899 classic study, blacks toiled primarily as general laborers, hod carriers, carters, cooks, caterers, barbers, laundrymen and women, porters, bootblacks, and domestics.

Significantly, however, the African-American urban population, although occupationally repressed, shared a common poverty and common unsegregated urban space with their immigrant neighbors. In the early 20th century actress Ethel Waters as well as policeman-turned-writer Alan Ballard recalled Philadelphia childhoods spent in neighborhoods com-

prised of an ethnic and racial mix of Irish, Italians, and Jews. Although blacks in Philadelphia and other cities entered the manufacturing sector during World War I, the Great Migration northward, plus the increasing social and residential segregation which characterized the 1920s, gave birth by 1930 to an embryonic ghetto and yielded the first evidence of concentrated black urban poverty.

The Great Depression and Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal farm policies, which benefitted large capital-intensive agriculture while rendering black tenant farmers and sharecroppers, indigent and homeless, and World War II, which created economic opportunities for blacks in northern shipyards, aircraft factories, and other war industries accelerated black migration during the later 1930s and 1940s. By the 1950s these factors had not only firmed the foundation of the modern black metropolis, but also established a segregated, isolated, deprived environment rife for underclass development.

Black population growth in Philadelphia, Chicago and other cities soared after World War II. Between 1950 and 1970 the percentages of blacks living in northern cities doubled from 14 percent to 33 percent in Chicago, from 16 to 38 percent in Detroit, and from 18 to 34 percent in Philadelphia. At the same time the related forces of deindustrialization and suburbanization transformed American cities socially, economically, and spatially. In the postwar era city and federal government officials teamed with private corporate executives, bankers, realtors, and developers to transform gritty downtowns into modern renaissance centers, showplaces for the postindustrial urban economy.

Postwar urban redevelopment (after 1954 urban "renewal") aimed to clear slums, rebuild blighted downtowns, and link cities to growing suburbs and to other cities via dazzling freeways and beltways. Federally funded or underwritten renewal, highway and suburb-building created the modern "Crabgrass Frontier," a whole new postwar world of endless subdivisions, shopping malls, and office and industrial parks. Low-interest federal and veterans' housing administration loans lubricated the process whereby millions of urbanites flocked to the Levittowns, Drexelbrooks, and Park Forests springing up on the cool, green, rim of the city. Suburbia unfolded as a white middle class world, home to that critical segment of managers, engineers, technicians, and professionals who staffed the nation's new service, management, and high technology-oriented economy. Meanwhile, through real estate appraisal tactics, zoning and restrictive covenants and other devices (some ruled unconstitutional in 1948), federal housing officials and private bankers and realtors conspired to keep urban blacks walled inside urban ghettos.

Within the aging inner-city neighborhoods abandoned by fleeing whites formed the equally modern postwar black ghetto first described as early as 1948 by a young federal housing official, Robert Weaver, who would later become the first head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the first African American in a president's cabinet. Unlike prewar black neighborhoods where clusters of African-American families adjoined nearby concentrations of white residents, the new black ghetto was exclusively inhabited by African Americans. Therefore, after World War II urban isolation and concentrated poverty arose in tandem for the first time and an urban underclass materialized as a unique urban phenomenon. Evidence of underclass formation appeared for the first time as early as the 1950s.

Government policy and urban restructuring converged to produce both modern ghettoization and the early manifestation of "problem families," an early inkling of pernicious concentrated poverty. Postwar urban renaissance, the redesign of encrusted old commercial-industrial districts into glitzy office canyons of glass and steel, involved both federally underwritten redevelopment and federal public housing. The 1949 Wagner- Ellender-Taft law established government-assisted urban redevelopment linked to the rehousing of those families uprooted in the process. Many of the many poor black families displaced by urban redevelopment actions were rehoused in public housing, a low-income shelter program launched in

1937 under the New Deal. Tragically, as the Philadelphia experience indicated, this federal renewal-rehousing policy bequeathed the kind of concentrated poverty that in the late 1960s and 1970s critics described as the underclass. In fact, as sociologist Lee Rainwater, journalist Nicholas Lemann, and others have shown public housing emerged not only as an important venue for the postwar black experience, but as a perfect laboratory for exploring the lives of poor African-American families.

One of Philadelphia's first three housing projects built under the 1937 Wagner Housing Act, the 1,324 unit Richard Allen Homes — named for the early Philadelphia religious leader — opened for occupancy in 1941 as housing for low-income black families. During World War II the 131 acre sea of red and yellow brick low-rise buildings housed black low-income as well as black families employed in war industries. Wartime project managers enforced strict standards of tenant eligibility, foreclosing any possibility that these "way-stations" for the temporarily submerged middle class might serve the "undeserving poor." Philadelphia housing officials limited eligibility at Allen to American citizens who had resided in the city one year prior to applying for admission. The housing authority also demanded that tenants be part of "natural… or cohesive family groups," defined as "working adults known to have regularly lived as an inherent part of a family group whose earnings are an integral part of the family income." While an aunt or uncle might be welcomed in Richard Allen as part of a family, not so "unrelated persons, or a person living alone." Therefore, lodgers, transient paying guests or single persons were barred as tenants.

Rising World War II wages and upwardly revised income limits for continued occupancy helped make project communities such as Richard Allen "spic and span places" with a vigorous social life fueled by a host of social organizations. In 1943 couples headed approximately 70 percent of the Allen families. Almost half of these families had between three and four members; 40 percent had over five members. It remained a lively, clean, well-ordered place as late as 1947 when an article in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* described "flowers blooming in Allen's front yards, children splashing in the spray pool, adults playing ping pong in the play room." The manager dubbed the project "a family of families [who] are economically and mentally a source of enrichment to one another."

After 1947 several events buffeted project communities such as Richard Allen. First Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy unleashed a strenuous campaign to evict all project families whose incomes exceeded the maximum for continued occupancy. By 1950 McCarthy's "over-max" crusade had purged hundreds of solid working class black families from Allen's tenant rolls. Secondly, champions of public housing, forced to rebut accusations that government housing was "communistic," countered by latching the policy to pro-business, urban redevelopment, and to the goal of a decent home and a decent environment for all Americans. Urban renewal had serious consequences for both public housing and Philadelphia's black community, coupled as it was during the 1950s with the demolition of the slums and temporary World War II housing, which sheltered the widening stream of black migrants arriving into Philadelphia from the South. Many of the thousands of black families dislocated from these areas by urban renewal comprised the "new [severely disadvantaged] clientele" for public housing.

Between 1950 and 1956 slum clearance — much of it for public housing projects — uprooted over 2,000 households in North Philadelphia alone. As elsewhere in urban America renewal most affected the inner-city black population. Large-scale demolition not only removed a sizeable stock of low-rent dwellings, it often eviscerated the heart of the inner-city economy. In the late 1950s residents of North Philadelphia huge Poplar Renewal Area complained about abandoned houses, vacant buildings, trash-filled lots, noise, juvenile delinquency, and the proliferation of tap rooms. By 1960 North Philadelphia renewal involved massive clearance operations which dislocated over 6,250 mainly black families and single per-

sons. Between 1950 and 1970 the number of dwelling units in North Philadelphia declined from almost 114,000 units to under 90,000.

But, urban renewal cleared work-places as well. During two years, 1962-1963, over 600 small laundries, repair shops, groceries, garages, ice yards, bakeries, junk shops and other small businesses, which once dominated the North Philadelphia economic landscape, vanished into rubble. These businesses had provided jobs for neighborhood residents as handymen, washers, stock boys, garage attendants, ice handlers, and junk men — jobs that had historically formed an economic bulwark against the many insecurities of low-income black life. Therefore, renewal eroded the delicate economic fabric of the poor inner-city black community.

Black Poverty Under the Capitol Dome. (CORBIS/Bettman/UPI)

However, while businesses and residential structures disappeared from North Philadelphia, people did not. Over 90 percent of displaced families and single persons moved back into the area within a mile of their destroyed residence. Most of these dislocated persons were poor. Over 60 percent of families displaced between 1958 and 1962 had annual incomes under $3,000, a third were either divorced, widowed or separated; 19 percent were single. Another study of 780 families uprooted during the years 1963-1964 found half of these households dependent on welfare, child support or pensions. Thirty-eight percent of the household heads were not in the labor force; 39 percent were headed by a female. Moreover, postwar studies found that a third of the families displaced by renewal had incomes low enough for public housing and after passage of the 1954 Housing Act won "first preference" in available units; over 90 percent of these uprooted North Philadelphia households were black. Increasingly, in the postwar era these displaced black households constituted the pool of North Philadelphia families seeking shelter in places such as the Richard Allen Homes.

Race infused every aspect of postwar housing and redevelopment policy. Despite the landmark 1948 decision in *Skelly* v. *Kramer* outlawing restrictive covenants and Philadelphia's 1950 City Charter pledging the city to a policy of non-racial or religious discrimination, the city's real estate and homebuilding industry blatantly pursued policies contributing to the building of the ghetto. Moreover, despite a commitment to "integrated occupancy" published in 1952, Philadelphia's public housing, like Chicago's, was grossly segregated. The hardening boundaries of the Philadelphia's black ghetto, abetted by Federal Housing Administration real estate appraisal policies, which branded black neighborhoods and areas adjoining those with black residents as "too risky" for mortgage loans, stymied private investment in the inner-city and prevented black movement to better housing on the urban periphery. Meanwhile, public housing in Philadelphia became blacker and poorer.

The growth of the number of poor black tenants in public housing seemingly defied an overall postwar trend, 1945-1973 which witnessed measurable economic progress for all Americans including urban blacks. The process of economic restructuring, however, adversely affected the sizeable black population who clung precariously to the edges of the old industrial economy. In effect, as several historians have observed, many blacks after World War II experienced the dissolution of that narrow but vital niche among the working poor, which blacks had secured in America's manufacturing job market between World War I and World War II.

This process, sometimes called in the literature "deproletarianism," was plainly visible in postwar Philadelphia, especially among the residents of the Richard Allen Homes. Between 1947 and 1965 employment in the city's basic industries plummeted by a quarter. Philadelphia's once sovereign textile industry was severely weakened in the 1920s, recovered slightly during World War II, and then expired afterward — this time for good. The city's manufacturing sector fared no better. Once the home to giants such as the Baldwin Locomotive Works, between 1945 and 1975, Philadelphia lost two-thirds of the jobs in metal manufacturing. Baldwin collapsed in the l930s. By 1963 North Philadelphia's Budd Corporation, producer of truck trailers and railroad passenger cars, trimmed its work force by almost half; Midvale Steel cut nearly a third of its North Philadelphia workforce; while Crown Can released over half its workers.

The decline in Philadelphia manufacturing was general, not confined to metals and textiles. Jobs in chemicals fell 20 percent; in food processing 26 percent, and in tobacco manufacturing 76 percent. The latter especially affected black Philadelphia, for companies such as Bayuk Cigar employed many black women — some of whom lived in the Richard Allen Homes.

North Philadelphia, therefore, felt the full brunt of deindustrialization. In fact, between 1928 and 1972 one study estimated that the area lost as many as 50,000 manufacturing jobs. The number of North Philadelphians who reported employment sank from over 143,000 in 1950 to under 72,000 in 1970. In 1946 a wide variety of over 450 businesses and industries crowded North Philadelphia below Allegheny Avenue. These establishments included breweries, hat makers, battery makers, ice cream factories, ice and coal yards, warehouses and laundries. By 1970 obsolescence, corporate consolidations, buy-outs, urban renewal, and suburban relocations expunged them from the city's tax rolls. Therefore, during the 1950s North Philadelphia experienced an ominous transformation. The Quaker City's white population declined while its black population rose by a third and its manufacturing base vanished. Where once Irish, German, Polish and Jewish families built communities around thriving textile and metal manufacturing enterprises, African Americans now scratched for an existence in an economic wasteland.

Such forces of urban decay operated most destructively on the most vulnerable, those black families whose low incomes and shelter problems qualified them for public housing. In 1945 almost a quarter of the male workers in Richard Allen Homes held jobs as skilled crafts-

men, most in Philadelphia's large primary metals industry. Sixty percent of the breadwinners in the project worked in metal manufacturing or the transportation industry. By 1960 only a quarter of Allen's gainfully employed labored in manufacturing; a mere 15 percent had jobs in metal-working industries.

The decline in Allen residents' employment in metal manufacturing was paralleled by a growing proportion of Richard Allen women working in the city's dwindling but still extant textile and garment firms. Moreover, an increasing number of household heads labored in the retail, health and other jobs of Philadelphia's growing service sector. In 1960 over 60 percent of the breadwinners in the project worked as either maids in department stores or laundresses, orderlies, or aides in city hospitals. By 1965, the year of Moynihan's report on the black family, a clear pattern had emerged in the Richard Allen Homes. Characterized in the 1940s and early 1950s by working, two-parent families, Allen had already become by the early 1960s a place in which women headed over 50 percent of the households, where nearly a quarter of all household heads were not in the labor force, and many barely survived on low paychecks or public assistance.

Faced as early as the mid-1950s with the reality of a "new cliental," public housing managers fought valiantly, but unsuccessfully, to preserve the public image of housing projects as good, well-managed communities of hardworking families. Policy makers portrayed places such as Richard Allen as publicly-owned real estate operations, not welfare hotels. Housing authorities hired managers to collect rent and maintain buildings and grounds; the job never included social work. Therefore, public housing managers reluctantly admitted that their normal families were being replaced by "broken" or "damaged" families and that the change forced them to reconsider their stubborn adherence to a strict real estate management role.

By 1955 estimates nationally placed the welfare population in public housing at from 35 to 40 percent. Public housing rents no longer covered operating costs. To stem the environmental deterioration at Allen, management orchestrated garden and tree planting projects, and improved trash collection. But, no matter how luxuriant the flower boxes or the rose arbors that framed the entrance to the management offices, incidents of juvenile delinquency and vandalism escalated. Philadelphia attempted to mobilize city social resources in a campaign called "Plus Values for the Family in Public Housing." City housing officials identified all of the region's public and private agencies available to serve public housing clients including the Boy and Girl Scouts, the Free Library, several settlement houses, and the YWCA. These agencies would help tenants "understand and accept financial responsibility…in a businesslike way," and develop "balanced ways of life [allowing them to] grow into useful, contributing citizens."

The "Plus Values" campaign, like management's crusade to mobilize community agencies to "Keep Allen Beautiful" represented early heroic efforts by public housers to halt a life-threatening disease that social epidemiologists labeled "the problem family." The social virus was first identified in Philadelphia in 1952 when the housing authority's Subcommittee on Tenant Selection reported that in addition to low income, many of the families being uprooted from the Poplar urban redevelopment area had "other problems." The committee characterized these families as having "too many children…[making] a great deal of noise, quarrel[ing] among themselves, indulge[ing] in hostilities with neighbors…[being] chronic alcoholics, narcotics addicts, active T.B. cases, lack[ing] control over their children, tear[ing] up the physical structure," or "engaging in prostitution or random relationships which resemble it." The committee members faced an anguishing dilemma. On the one hand the multiple social defects of these problem families warranted excluding them from public housing; on the other hand these were the uprooted household deemed by the Authority most in need of rehousing. Accordingly, the committee redefined "acceptability" to mean "reasonably stable family groups with some strengths which appeared capable of progress as distinguished from

those families with deep, long-term problems which would cause continuous disturbance in a low-rent housing community."

By considerably broadening public housing's responsibility for sheltering uprooted families, the l954 federal housing legislation made those fine behavioral distinctions used by housing authorities in 1952 moot. Elizabeth Wood, the Executive Secretary of the Chicago Housing Authority, confessed that the requirement to evict over-maximum income families and accept families uprooted by urban renewal "has put us in a different kind of business… for which we are not prepared." Wood recalled her days as a young Chicago social worker when the intractable case — she used for her example a habitually drunken fictitious client, Mrs. McGee, and her abusive and equally besotted husband — was transferred to the county to languish on the dole. "My dear brothers and sisters in the public housing business," intoned Wood standing before a large audience at the l956 annual National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials conference, "you are [now] getting the McGees."

IV

Between l956 and l960 the "problem family" loomed as the number one policy issue in public housing. During these years social work and housing literature, brimmed with articles entitled "The Problem Family," "Helping Families in Trouble," and "The Unwed Mother and Public Housing." The realization that public housing had become a haven for broken and dysfunctional families perplexed and further disillusioned liberal intellectuals who echoed the *New York Times* writer Harrison Salisbury's 1958 broadside that sheltering dope-abusing dads and sexually loose moms in public housing left them "the same bunch of bastards they always were." "It is now considered more likely," wrote Daniel Seligman the same year in *Fortune*, "that the slums simply attract problem families. And their problems will not be erased by putting these families in public housing projects." Two years later the federal government finally acknowledged that public housing sheltered "troubled families." President John F. Kennedy that year appointed Marie McGuire Commissioner of Public Housing. Brandishing the slogan "People Oriented Public Housing," McGuire redefined public housing from a real estate program into centers for the delivery of welfare services.

The odyssey of Philadelphia's Richard Allen Homes and management's struggle there to contend with the "problem family" issue reveals that in the policy-molded environment of public housing, postwar segregation, urban renewal, and economic restructuring had spawned in the ghetto a new social phenomenon long before social scientists defined it in the 1970s. The Allen experience indicates that in the 1950s these processes created "troubled families" whose profile closely resembled what scholars have called the underclass. Public housing projects such as the Richard Allen Homes did not create the black underclass. However, policy they in conjunction with urban renewal did function to concentrated and isolate, socially and spatially, a growing segment of the black poor whose many disadvantages — inferior education, unemployment, illegitimacy, crime, alcoholism and drug abuse — became hallmarks of the underclass.

Public housing's troubled families remained hidden in the 1950s. At the end of the decade social commentators Michael Harrington and Dwight McDonald noted that America's robust postwar economy rendered poverty either invisible or isolated in the rural South or urban pockets like the Richard Allen Homes. After 1973, when the percentage of African Americans in poverty reached its lowest point, the American economy stalled and the twin forces of deindustrialization and persistent racial segregation battered the remnants of the urban-industrial economy, eviscerating the black, inner-city communities. Buffeted by stagflation and higher petroleum prices, American manufacturing during the 1970s lost its competitive advantage

vis-a-vis foreign producers, yielding rapid disinvestment and a sharp decline in the nation's older industrial centers such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Philadelphia. But, losses in manufacturing, were matched by a sizeable growth in the urban service sector especially nonproductive business services such as finance, insurance, real estate, law, marketing, accounting, and engineering. By 1988 business services and advanced technology represented 61 percent of Philadelphia's regional manufacturing economy, which significantly tended to locate outside the central city making it inaccessible to Philadelphia's large pool of African-American workers who in any case generally lacked the necessary skills, because they have been systematically denied the necessary education. That population concentrated in the city's inner-core of neighborhoods, increasingly isolated in an economic wasteland scarred by the empty hulks of abandoned 19th-century factories and warehouses, and pockmarked by rows of gutted houses.

Postindustrialism especially devastated the urban world of young unskilled blacks who resided in South Chicago, South-Central Los Angeles, and North Philadelphia. By the 1980s joblessness, hopelessness, and drugs transformed these neighborhoods into a phantasmagoria of disintegrating family life, random violence, and desperation captured sometimes brutally, sometimes sympathetically in the works of film makers such as Spike Lee and John Singleton. No one disputes the facts; only the causes of the mayhem. Nationally, in 1987 African Americans comprised 41 percent of all murder victims. Between 1970 and 1984 the number of black households headed by a female, increased by 51 percent; by 1984 women headed 43 percent of all black families, up from 28 percent in 1970. By 1984, in centers of concentrated black poverty such as Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes, females headed 90 percent of families with children and 83 percent of the project families lived on welfare.

Conservatives blamed rising crime and dependency rates in the inner city on morally injurious federal and state welfare policies and on the "coddling" of criminals. Liberals and others rejected the welfare thesis pointing out that the value of government transfer payments actually declined in the 1970s and 1980s while the number of female-headed families rose. In explaining the underclass, they focused instead on urban restructuring, but also on the operation of "historic discrimination" which erected seemingly insurmountable obstacles to the kind of bootstrap entrepreneurship that sustained and undergird the mobility of many earlier immigrants. These scholars pointed to the corrosive effect of urban isolation, a negative consequence of black and white middle class flight from the inner-city, which rendered black neighborhoods devoid of useable middle class role models, job networks, and any functional contact with stable, positive social systems.

Massey and Denton added the final crucial element to the underclass equation: hypersegregation. Ghettoized blacks, they argue endured not only high levels of concentrated poverty, but also segregation. In hypersegregated neighborhoods a third or more of families were poor. Such poverty-compounded segregation concentrated and exaggerated all the maladies of ghetto living: disproportionately large numbers of female headed households, crime, drugs, housing dilapidation, abandoned and boarded up buildings, even fires. In fact, hypersegregation has bred the "oppositional culture" described eloquently by Elijah Anderson in *Streetwise* which shows how ghetto youth erected a set of behaviors and values diametrically opposed to the norms of the wider straight society to counter the harsh, violent reality of the street. The street youth he studied derided hard work, sobriety, steady employment, financial security, marriage and family as "acting white" and, thus, irrelevant. According to Anderson, Philadelphia's alienated underclass youth completely divorced themselves from these conventional values. Streetwise young black men and women engage in a vicious, highly exploitative game, in which men prize women not for love, but as booty; women are objects to be claimed and controlled. Women like men reject meaningful stable relationships, and seek gratification not in the sexual conquest, but in pregnancy and childbirth itself. The "gift child" becomes the prize, a requisite for membership in the neighborhood baby club.

V

The late 20th-century urban underclass may be, as we have suggested, nothing more than the latest version of the residium. Historians of poverty agree that western societies have traditionally defined a lowest, ignominious category of the poor and branded it "undeserving." But such labeling ignores the profound impact that global economic forces have exerted in shaping contemporary poverty. Since the dawn of industrialization, economic structures — the size of the workplace, the organization of work, the level of technology — have significantly shaped the profile of the poor and helped determine whether society regarded them as morally worthy or unworthy of assistance.

Structural forces loom especially large in any attempt to comprehend modern concentrated poverty and the peculiar dilemma of the hypersegregated poor. Deindustrialization demolished the opportunity structure erected over 200 years in such hubs of manufacturing as Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. It decimated the complex infrastructure of hat factories, warehouses, machine shops, railroad yards, docks, breweries, and junk yards that comprised the economic foothold for centuries of white immigrants seeking a niche in urban America. Postindustrialism not only redefined productivity by replacing goods manufacturing with information processing, it also suburbanized work sites and devised and imposed a new and more rigorous set of educational and behavioral standards for labor participation and employment success. While postindustrialism's toll included steelworkers in Pittsburgh and auto workers in Detroit, it struck hardest at America's newest proletariat, the huge black migrant workforce that between 1917 and 1945 had battled job discrimination and gained for the first time a foothold in the world of urban industrialism.

The Richard Allen Homes case study illustrates how the promise of postwar industrial labor for levels of female-headed households, dependency, squalid living conditions, vandalism and crime and reinforces Massey and Denton's insistence that segregation was the principal ingredient in this underclass-making process. Black migrants flooding into wartime and post World War II urban America faced open hostility from their white ethnic neighbors. Postwar segregation patterns hardened at the same time deindustrialization eroded the basis for black opportunity. The process intensified after 1973 producing hypersegregated black ghettos and the effulgence of an oppositional culture. Postwar ghetto life featured not the dynamic density of James Weldon Johnson's "Black Manhattan," but for black youth in particular, despair and a militant rejection of all of the values of the "outside" society marked ghetto life.

Gilding the modern ghetto with "enterprise zones," or enhancing welfare programs hardly addresses the source of the underclass dilemma. Most modern, inner-city neighborhoods are segregated islands of concentrated poverty isolated from the postindustrial urban world. Opportunity for participation in the burgeoning economy of silicon chips, corporate finance, and global marketing, rarely knocks at the ghetto door. Hypersegregated inner city communities whether in Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, or Washington, D.C., lack the social, economic and political resources to combat hopelessness and promote social and economic restructuring. Indeed, isolated, segregated neighborhoods are anachronisms in global economies, which prize open markets and value most the mobility of ideas, goods, and people. Ghetto walls must come down, and the social and cultural isolation end before the modern underlcass can join its historical counterparts in oblivion.

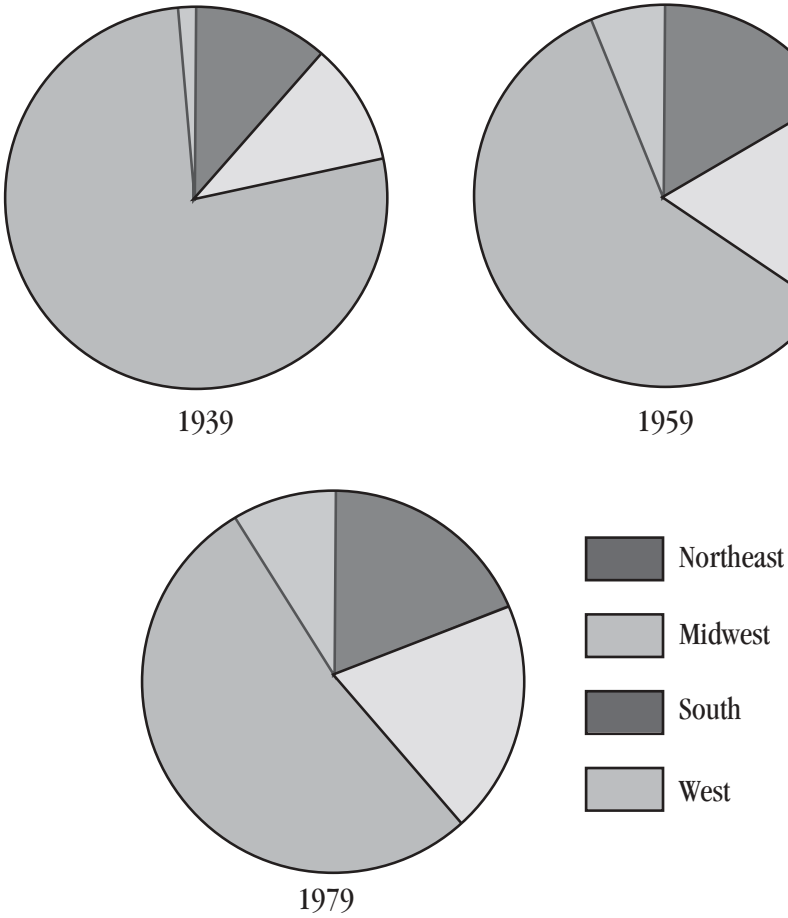
Table 16.1

Percent of Americans in Poverty, 1949-84

	1949	1959	1969	1974	1984
Blacks	79	55	33	30	30
Whites	50	18	10	9	12

From: Jaynes and Williams, **A Common Destiny,** *p. 278.*

Chart 16.1
Regional Distribution of U.S. Black Population, 1939-1979



From: Paul Boyer, **Promises to Keep,** *(Lexington, MA., 1995) p. 167*

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Chapter Seventeen

African-American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope

Walter B. Allen

> The contempt we have been taught to entertain for the Blacks makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason nor in experience.
>
> — Alexander Hamilton

During the past 30 years, well over a thousand publications have been added to the research record on African-American families in the United States. The count would be much higher if we adopted a broader interpretation of what qualifies as systematic, scientific study of African-American families. To do so would require the inclusion of additional sources from a wide range of scholarly, literary, popular, and religious writings.

Despite the voluminous research on black family life, students of the area are uneasy. This uneasiness is caused by continued references to "The Black Family." Such references ignore the extensive regional, ethnic, value, and income differences among black families. It is an uneasiness with the theoretical and methodological shoddiness, bordering on suspension of the scientific method, apparent in so many published, widely circulated studies of black families. This uneasiness is bred by entrenched, stereotypic portrayals of black family life which not only persist, but dominate. It is an uneasiness due to a frequently demonstrated ignorance concerning the internal dynamics and motives of black family life in this society.

DIVERSITY AND STEREOTYPES IN THE STUDY OF BLACK FAMILY LIFE

Much that is written about black American families is flawed by the tendency of researchers to gloss over within-group differences. While prior research has explored black/white family differences, information is relatively sparse regarding differences among African-American families of different incomes, regions, life-cycle stages, and value orientations. As a result, monolithic, stereotypic characterizations of black families abound. The black family headed by a single mother with numerous children and living in a roach-infested tenement is a familiar stereotype. This image has been reinforced in the hallowed halls of universities, on the frenetic sets of movie and television shows, as well as in the august halls of Congress. That this stereotype represents but a limited slice of black family life in the United States is bad; that it distorts the truth about female-headed households in the black community is worse. Such stereotypes leave the genuinely curious searching for the true face(s) of black family life in this country.

As a society, the United States is comfortable with stereotypes. Indeed, we revel in them. Stereotypes serve a useful function: they help to reduce the complexity, nuances, and dilemmas of life to manageable proportions. In this respect, Americans are no different from other people. Generally speaking, humans seek to organize reality by extracting neat categories of meaning(s). Thus, we become accustomed to loose usage of terms charged with unstated implications to summarize our day-to-day experiences. Designations such as "liberals," "born-again Christians," "fascists," "feminists," and "racists" are commonplace in our daily discourse. Rarely, in the next breath, are the intricacies of meaning apparent in such terms clarified. Why should they be? We all know what is meant by them . . . or do we?

Race is an area of inquiry in the social and behavioral sciences which is particularly affected by our willingness to accept simplistic, unsupported and stereotypic statements at face value. Such scientific confusion may have complex explanations, such as the difficulty of disentangling race from culture from history; or the explanations may be more simple, as in the failure to recognize that race is not a perfect predictor of a person's psyche, values, or even experiences. Therefore, for both complex and simple reasons, race continues to be one of the most widely studied, yet most poorly understood, areas of scientific inquiry. As Frazier noted, and DuBois before him, ours is a society obsessed with color. How we think about and interact about race, therefore, exerts profound influence on the broader realities of black individuals, groups, and institutions. These are topics requiring further study.

Predictably, black family studies share many problems with the related area of race relations research. Writers in the area obscure much of the richness, complexity, and subtleties of African-American family systems through their use of crude categories, poorly defined concepts, and negative stereotypes. Apparent in the literature are abundant references to "family disorganization," the "underclass," "culture of poverty," and "the Black Matriarchy." Such terms are offered, picked up, and repeated as if they effectively summarized the reality of black family life in this society. They do not. Unfortunately, with successive repetition, such concepts and the myths which they represent become more palatable and more believable. Equally dissatisfying are terms offered from the "other side" in the ongoing debate over pathology and well-being among black American families. For me, the issue is not wholly over whether black families should be cast as good or bad, positive or negative. Both views pursued to an extreme tamper with reality, become stereotypic and ultimately dehumanize black families. In its most fundamental sense, life is a collage of good, bad, and indifferent; so, too, is black family life.

We wish to set aside debates over black family wellness or illness. The record of these families in insuring the survival and development of black Americans on these shores since 1619 is sufficient evidence of their adaptability and viability. Instead, we are concerned with seeing the core of black family life, with exploring their essential character. To this extent, the research question is recast, from "wellness" or "illness" to "is-ness." What are the significant qualities, characteristics, and dimensions of black family life revealed in the research record from 1965 to the present? What environmental and historical conditions determine whether the tenor of a black family's experiences is favorable? What are the distinctive features of Afro-American family life? In sum, the need is to understand black families for who and what they are.

DEFINITION AND CURRENT STATUSES OF BLACK FAMILIES

Before we undertake to examine the experiences of black American families, we must first decide how best to define these families. Properly, the criteria for definition will vary in accordance with the definition(s) used by authors whose research is being examined. Readers should therefore expect to see, and not be put off by, shifts in the parameters used to define black family life. In some cases, location will be emphasized, thus defining family as

coterminous with household. In other cases, blood ties will be relied on to define the boundaries of a given black family. At still other points, functional ties such as shared emotional support or economic responsibilities will be used to define families. In our thinking, emphasis of shared location over, say, affiliational ties as the criterion for defining family relationship is an analytic decision. Such decisions do not alter the fact that black families are defined by complicated overlaps between location, functional relations, shared values, affiliations, and blood ties. As such, black families represent complex systems of relationships which transcend any one of these areas of life. Our accommodation to multiple definitions of black family life simply admits the current limitations in social science theory and methods which require that researchers restrict their focus to smaller parcels of the family system which they seek to understand. However, a consistent feature across researcher definitions is the primacy assigned to blood ties. At root, black families are seen as institutions whose most enduring relationships are biological.

Systematic examinations of significant trends and statuses in black American family life offer useful lessons for evaluating scientific research in the area. The history of black Americans, like that of any people, is marked by change. Black Americans have experienced four major transitions over their history, each left legacies which influence contemporary black family life. The first and most obvious transition involved bringing captured Africans to this country as slaves. For enslaved Africans, this transition involved both gross (e.g., the loss of personal freedom) and subtle (e.g., exposure to plantation agriculture) redefinitions. Out of these redefinitions was created a new people, African Americans, who represented cultural, social, and yes, biological hybrids. The second major transition in African-American history involved emancipation: Blacks were freed from slavery. This status change was accompanied, however, by the equally demeaning and restrictive redefinition of blacks as an "untouchable"-like caste group in American society. It is worth noting that, while over time the terms of reference (e.g., Negro, Colored, black, African American) have changed, the degraded cast status of black people has been an immutable constant. On the heels of this evolution of blacks from slavery to cast status came the geographic, socioeconomic and cultural transitions of black America from a Southern, rural, agrarian folk society to a Northern, Western and Mid-Western, industrial society. In four generations, or roughly 300 years, African Americans had moved from agrarian slavery into the industrial and urban heartlands of this country. They had become hybrids, combing the heritages of their African and American experiences.

The fourth major transition for African Americans involved the desegregation of U.S. society. This transition was most notably signalled by the string of Presidential Orders and Supreme Court decisions banning racial segregation in public life (e.g., the 1949 Presidential Order desegregating the military, the 1954 Court decision outlawing segregated public schools). A major impetus for the desegregation of American society were the activities and actors associated with the Civil Rights Movement. However, efforts to desegregate U.S. institutional, corporate, and community life at all levels have so far proven to be only partially successful. Vestiges of past disadvantages and persistent discrimination in the present continue to restrict black equality and participation in this society.

THE EMPIRICAL PICTURE: PATTERNS AND TRENDS

Government statistics convey valuable information about the contemporary faces of black families. Such statistics are admittedly limited in what they reveal concerning the nuances of black family life. However, these statistics do provide valuable insight into the broad pattern characteristic of black families currently. By 1991, the black presence in this country had grown to roughly 31 million, representing 13 percent of the total U.S. population

and some 7.7 million households. A massive geographic redistribution had also occurred. Since 1945 there has been a sizable drop in the percentages of black residents or born natives of the South (the figure declined from 80 to 50 percent); contemporary blacks and their households are overwhelmingly located in urban areas (nearly 85 percent). Recent statistics suggest sizable modifications in historically observed patterns: increasing numbers of blacks will likely return to the South and/or move to suburbs or small towns.

The trend toward increased numbers of female-headed black households continued. By 1992, 46 percent of all black households had female heads; in addition, the percentage of dual-parent households had declined to 47 percent (respectively, 18 percent and 77 percent in 1940). Consistent with shifts in family headship were declines in the percentage of black children residing with both parents, from 75 percent in 1960 to 36 percent by 1992. Black childbearing rates continued their steady drop toward replacement levels, reaching an all-time low total fertility rate of an estimated 2.28 children per woman by 1975 (as compared with 2.62 in 1940). Finally, rates of marital dissolution and lifelong singlehood continued to rise among black Americans during the period. The latter statistic certainly reflects, in part, the great imbalance between men and women in the critical marriage and childbearing years (in 1974, there were 100 men for every 116 women aged 20-54, not adjusting for men lost from the pool of eligibles for reasons of imprisonment, interracial preferences, homosexuality, etc.). By 1992, fewer than 3 of 4 black women will eventually marry compared to 9 out of 10 white women.

Along with shifts in the geography and structure of family life among blacks, came important changes in the socioeconomic status. Median family income levels have been rising since 1947. By 1991, the real median income of black families was $33,310 compared to $41,510 for white families. The 1991 real median income for black female-headed households was substantially lower: $11,410. The percentage of black family incomes below the poverty level also dropped steadily, from 41 percent in 1959 to 15 percent in 1974. By 1991, however, the number of black families below the poverty line had risen to 32 percent.

Accompanying changes in family income levels were changes in the educational and occupational attainments of black Americans. Since 1940, the median years of school completed by blacks has doubled to 12.6. Some 83 percent of blacks have four or more years of high school, and 11 percent have four or more years of college. Both of the latter figures represent a six-fold increase from 1940 to 1975. In the world of work, contradictory trends are observed. On the one hand, black representation in higher status occupations has increased dramatically. From 1960 to 1972, the percentage of black workers in white-collar jobs grew from 16 percent to 45 percent. On the other hand, since 1978 black labor force participation rates have declined steadily, down to 70 percent for men and 58 percent for women by the year 1992. Unemployment rates have continued to rise, reaching crisis levels in many black communities across the country.

When attention turns to health, morbidity, and mortality statistics, major improvements are again noted for African Americans. Life expectancies for black men and black women are now respectively 65 and 74 years, respectively, versus 51 and 55 years in 1940. The infant mortality rate has been cut from 80 to 18 per 1,000 live births, while maternal deaths in childbirth have been reduced eight-fold (to fewer than .2 per 1,000 live births). Black deaths due to so-called "poverty diseases" (e.g., tuberculosis, venereal disease, cirrhosis of the liver, and contagious disease) have also been drastically curtailed. Moreover, the percentage of black families residing in substandard housing dropped from over 50 percent in 1940 to less than 25 percent by 1970.

The picture conveyed by this overview of key government statistics is one of gradual but steady improvement in the life circumstances of black families. During the African American's transition from the rural South into the urban North, significant improvements have occurred

in health, education, income, occupation and housing. Lest a false sense of complacency result, however, it must be pointed out that deprivation and disadvantage are relative concepts. Compared to white families in this society, black families continue to be extremely disadvantaged. Now, as earlier in this country's history, the occupational and educational attainments, health statuses, housing conditions, incomes, and life opportunities of white Americans are far superior to those of their black brethren. When select subcategories of black families (e.g., urban, lower-income, aged, etc.) are compared to black families in the general case, another level of inequality is revealed. Vast differences in resources, opportunities, and quality of life are often found among black families of different incomes, regions, and headship statuses (e.g., two-parent vs. single-parent).

The aggregate statistics discussed above conceal a complex array of underlying relationships. For this reason, what a particular statistical pattern reveals about the nature of black family life in this society is not always clear. Undoubtedly poor health, chronic unemployment, teen parenthood, paternal absence, and poverty have potentially negative consequences for black family organization and functions. However, the relative impact of these factors on particular families are mediated by those families' resources, values, and situations. It is thus important to recognize that individual and family characteristics help to determine whether certain conditions are positive or negative in the effects, and to what degree. We can now turn our attention to a consideration of the complicated interaction between class and culture in African-American families.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES: CLASS, CULTURE, AND BLACK FAMILY LIFE

Researchers have long debated the importance of economics and culture in the determination of black family organization and functions. E. Franklin Frazier, University of Chicago (1930), profoundly influenced our thinking about the interplay of class and race in black family life. Writing in an era of social concern with the consequences of industrialization and rapid urbanization for families, Frazier focuses his attention on black families. He rejects explanations attributing high rates of marital instability, desertion, and illegitimacy among urban black families to innate, biological deficiencies. Rather, Frazier believes these disrupted family patterns were caused by a unique historical experience which left some black Americans ill-prepared to cope with the exigencies of life in modern, industrial society. Briefly, he argues that personal and institutional discrimination in society placed blacks at a severe economic disadvantage, with ruinous consequences for their family life. Denied the skills necessary to insure economic viability, black men fell short in the performance of their provider roles, thereby contributing to the break-up of families. Hence, Frazier largely attributes family disorganization among blacks to economic factors, suggesting in the process that as black families achieved higher economic status, their rates of disorganization would drop.

Certain features in Frazier"s research make its application to the analysis of contemporary black family life problematic. First is his failure to specify the societal-level processes thought to determine black family patterns. At best, readers are left with vague impressions of such processes and their causal operation. Second is his consistent denial of legitimacy to aspects of black family life representing departures from normative white family patterns. Third is his implicit attribution of cultural consequences to economic deprivation, such that the idea of cultural continuities in family disorganization is advanced. Black family disorganization, he argues, results from a self-perpetuating tradition of fragmented, pathological interaction within lower-class black urban communities. A culture of poverty, if you will, is said to develop. Frazier basically proposes a socio-economic/cultural deprivation model for interpretation of black family life, as an alternative to then current biological deficit models. Unfortunately, Frazier's perspective is sometimes equally injurious to the image and under-

standing of black family life. By treating racial discrimination in vague historic terms, denying the legitimacy of black cultural forms, and fostering deterministic views of poverty and its consequences, his perspective lends itself to interpretations of black families as pathological. Where black families exhibit signs of disorganization, the tendency is to seek internal rather than external causes or, for that matter, to not question the ethnocentric connotations of the family disorganization concept. Vivid illustration of this point is provided in Moynihan's work, which is closely patterned after Frazier's. Moynihan portrays black family life as grim and concludes that

> At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of weakness in the Negro community at the present time.... The White family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability. By contrast, the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown.

While criticisms of Moynihan's conclusions were widespread, perhaps the most penetrating and thought-provoking criticism was offered by Hare. In 1976, Hare suggested that Moynihan, by neglecting Frazier's crucial linkage of black family pathologies with racial oppression, "... had stood Frazier's analysis on its head and made family instability the source of black occupational and economic degradation." Again, African Americans were blamed for their depressed status in society (and for any negative consequences deriving from this status), only in this instance, learned cultural, rather than innate biological, deficiencies were alluded to as causes. Rainwater in 1970 and Bernard in 1966 essentially concur with Moynihan's conclusions on the issue of culture and disorganization in black family life. They also see an intergenerational "tangle of pathology" founded on historic racial oppression but perpetuated by present-day destructive, cultural, and interactional patterns within black family life. However, even more than Moynihan, Rainwater, Bernard, and other supporters of the "socio-cultural determinism" perspective, adherents including Glazer and Schulz, explicitly restrict their generalizations to lower-class, urban blacks.

In contrast to proponents of socio-cultural determinism, Billingsley and others emphasize facets of Frazier's writings dealing with the economic determinates of black family organization. Writing from the socio-economic determinism perspective, Billingsley and others argue that black families — indeed black communities — are economically dependent on and subordinate to the larger society. Recognizing the inextricable dependence of black families on the society for resources linked to their sustenance and survival, Billingsley expands Frazier's original thesis, linking economics with family organization and function. The result is a typology outlining various structural adjustments which black families make in response to economic imperatives threatening their ability to provide for family member needs. The idea of differential susceptibility to economic and social discrimination is integral to Billingsley's argument; thus, more severe resource limitations cause low-income black families to display higher rates of disorganization than middle- and upper-income black families. To buttress this point, he presents case studies of middle-class black families and their accomplishments. In each instance, the long-term economic stability of these families enhanced their ability to maintain conventional patterns of organization, to fulfill member needs, and to conform to societal norms. Ladner, Rodman, Scanzoni, and Stack share this perspective through their stress on the primacy of immediate, economic factors over historic, cultural factors in the determination of black family organization. This perspective, it should also be noted, views lower-class, urban black family departures — where these occur — from normative family patterns as valid, sensible adaptations to the attendant circumstances of racial and economic oppression.

In summary, two competing perspectives, both derived from Frazier's earlier work, tend to dominate our thinking about relationships obtaining between class, culture, and black family life. Socio-cultural determinism attributes disorganization in black family life to what were initially adaptive responses to economic deprivation, but over time have become ingrained, self-perpetuating cultural traits. By contrast, socio-economic determinism views black family disorganization as an outgrowth of immediate economic deprivation. Quite simply, the question concerns the relative importance of class and culture in the determination of black family organization. Are black family organization patterns most effectively explained in terms of current economic circumstances or persistent cultural values? In my view, it is wisest to assume that where rates of family disorganization (measured by conventional indices, e.g., divorce, desertion, illegitimacy, and non-support rates) are high among African Americans, it is due more often to economic deprivation than to values which esteem such conditions.

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF BLACK FAMILY EXPERIENCE

Many problems associated with distortions of African-American family life in the literature owe to the inability, or refusal, of researchers to locate their findings within the settings experienced by these families. Black family patterns and outcomes are best understood when viewed in larger contexts. Historically, family researchers have tended to analyze and interpret black family life from the perspectives of white, middle-class families. Not surprisingly, the conclusions reached about black families have been wrong. Seen from outside rather than through the lenses provided by their special circumstances and experiences, African-American family values, behaviors, and styles have been alternately misrepresented and misunderstood. Without the perspective which attention to context provides, researchers who study black families have mistakenly portrayed the positive as negative, the patterned as chaotic, and the normative as deviant.

The model proposed here responds to a felt need for systematic approaches that unravel the effects of socio-cultural and economic-ecological context on African families in the United States. The necessity for developing models and strategies to assess the consequences of context for family functions and structure is obvious. In many ways, however, research on African-American families offers unique opportunities for pursuing such questions. As even casual perusal of the literature will attest, few other areas compare in terms of the sheer magnitude of vehement and prevalent disagreements over data and interpretations. Both historically and today, the special circumstances which characterize black family life in the United States warrant — indeed, require — that these families be examined in relation to their environments. Where this is done, one can expect clearer understandings of black family experiences. African-American families display an incredible diversity of value orientations, goals, behavioral patterns, structural arrangements, geographic locations, and socio-economic statuses. This is not to ignore the elements which are common to all African-American families — those qualities which join them and distinguish them from other families in the society. Rather, we seek to identify significant factors that combine to define the essential character the family life of Africans born and raised in the United States.

The model emphasizes two themes, stressing first the black family's socio-ecological contexts and second, the dynamic nature of black family experiences. These important themes are incorporated into the model through the use of multiple perspectives. The four perspectives used in combination are Social Systems Theory, the Ecological Perspective, the Developmental Conceptual Framework, and the Multiple Social Realities Perspective.

Social Systems Theory and the Ecological Perspective are used jointly to incorporate a focus on family environment. The model derives partially from a social systems view of

African- American family life. While Social Systems Theory as an approach to the study of family life was articulated and proposed much earlier by Parsons and Bales, its most systematic application to the analysis of black families came in 1968. Billingsley argues that the social systems approach to the study of black families was necessary ". . . precisely because Negro families have been so conspicuously shaped by social forces in the American environment." He defines African-American families as social systems that contain aggregations of people and their accompanying social roles, bound together by patterns of mutual interaction and interdependence. Billingsley sees these families as embedded in networks of relationships that were both larger and smaller than themselves. Social Systems Theory is useful to the emerging model because it acknowledges the interdependent nature of black family life in this society. It shows that black families — and black individuals — depend on systematic linkages with societal institutions for sustenance and support.

The Human Ecology Perspective is best articulated in the work of Amos Hawley. This approach encourages the interpretation of family structure and process in relation to environmental constraints. Family organization and functioning are believed to represent adaptations which allow for the maximum exploitation of the physical and social environment. I was not able to identify contemporary research which explicitly applies the Ecological Perspective to the analysis of black family life. However, Bronfenbrenner's research on child development using an Ecological Perspective provides a useful illustration. In this work, "the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next." Bronfenbrenner identifies four levels of ecological environments: 1) the microsystem, a developing person's immediate setting; 2) the mesosystem, settings where the developing person participates; 3) the exosystem, settings which the person may never enter but where events occur to affect his immediate environment; and 4) the macrosystem, patterns of ideology and social organization characteristic of a particular society or culture. He places major stress on the interconnectedness occurring not only within, but also between, the different system levels. The Ecological Perspective's potential value for illuminating black family experiences is embodied in Bronfenbrenner's assertion that

> …by analyzing and comparing the micro-, meso-, and exosystems characterizing different social classes, ethnic and religious groups, or entire societies, it becomes possible to describe systematically and to distinguish the ecological properties of these larger social contexts as environments for human development.

The comprehensive black family model incorporates dynamism by merging elements of the Developmental Conceptual Framework and the Multiple Social Realities Perspective. The Developmental approach provides a framework for viewing family structure and process over the family life cycle. Families are viewed as traversing several developmental stages from their initial organization in marriage to their ultimate disintegration in divorce or death of a spouse. Associated with each state in the family life cycle are distinct family tasks and resources to accomplish these tasks. The Developmental approach to the study of family life is best discussed as a perspective in Hill and Rodgers or Duvall. Once more, I encountered difficulties identifying examples where this perspective was specifically applied to the analysis of black family life. Nevertheless, this model's emphasis on the changes black families and their members undergo over the family life cycle is drawn from the Developmental Perspective.

The remaining dynamic component of the model comes from the incorporation of the Multiple Social Realities Perspective. This perspective has its roots in Durkheim's 1933 discussion of social reality's multiple levels. He argues that there are apparent in social organization five strata, or levels: 1) geographic/demographic bases; 2) institutions and collective behavior; 3) symbols; 4) values, ideas, and ideals; and 5) states of the collective mind.

Georges Gurvitch, the French sociologist, provides a useful modification of Durkheim's ideas for our purposes. Arguing that "in order to integrate the various aspects of social reality, sociological theory must provide a systematic account of the dialectical interrelations of microsocial processes, groups, classes, and societies and their interpenetration at different levels of social reality." Gurvitch presents an excellent framework with which to approach the analysis of black family dynamics, a framework which Bosserman develops more fully in 1968. His framework speaks to the whole of social reality, differentiating these along two main axes, one horizontal and the other vertical. The horizontal axis corresponds to types of social frameworks, or categories, of which Gurvitch identifies three: forms of sociality (i.e., interpersonal interactions); groups (i.e., institutionalized forms of sociality, such as families or unions); and global societies (i.e., large combinations of diverse groups, such as nations). The vertical axis corresponds to levels of depth in social reality. Depth is determined by the accessibility of phenomena at each level to direct, external observation. The tenth and deepest level is the collective consciousness (i.e., shared collective mentality), while the surface or first level is represented by social morphology or ecology (i.e., geographic or demographic characteristics). Of paramount importance here is the implication that families will maintain dynamic, ever-changing relationships with agents, groups, and institutions at various levels in the society.

In sum, the proposed comprehensive model of African-American family life combines elements from various perspectives. The model is intended to reflect the ecological-environmental contingencies as well as the dynamic processes of black family realities in this country. Thus, it considers the nature of African-American family systemic relations, their responses to environmental factors, the changes they undergo over the life course, and their ongoing exchanges with other societal bodies.

THE BLACK FAMILY SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT MODEL

The black family Social-Ecological Context Model seeks to specify and interrelate the variety of institutional, interpersonal, environmental, temporal, and cultural factors that merge to determine the essential character of black family life in this society. While Figure 3 provides a full-blown presentation of this model, it is important to illustrate systematically the steps through which this final model was derived. Thus several figures, with accompanying discussion, precede our consideration of the model. The model seeks to be widely encompassing of variables and relationships, to draw from the myriad of factors believed to influence African-American family experiences. Although the model certainly fails to achieve this ideal goal, it does effectively outline the major parameters from which truly comprehensive approaches to the study of black family experiences can result. Bronfenbrenner qualifies his attempt to develop an encompassing perspective on child development as follows: "It is necessary to emphasize in this connection that it is neither necessary nor possible to meet all the criteria for ecological research within a single investigation." In this same spirit, given unavoidable limitations in resources and perspective, what is presented here is at best an approximation of the most comprehensive model possible.

A schematic representation of Billingsley's social systems perspective of black family life is provided in Figure 1. The concentric circles represent the embeddedness of African-American families in this society. Individuals exist in the context provided by their families; families exist in the contexts provided by their communities; and communities exist in the contexts provided by the larger society. Central to this model are the twin notions of interdependence and interpenetration. In essence, the perspective views black families as subsystems that are embedded in successively larger, nested systems. The conceptual model takes this sequential subsystems view as the fundamental point of departure. The next step was to "telescope" the concentric circles of the social system model outward. Next, the telescoped

subsystems are inverted in order to illustrate the increasingly restricted space and spheres of reference encountered as one moves from the wider macrosystems toward the innermost, smaller micro-subsystems (Figure 2). Here, the emerging model represents the different levels of social reality and demonstrates the fact that these levels are dynamically connected by their interdependence and interpenetration. Finally, Figure 3 elaborates upon and a presents systematically those mechanisms and linkages through which the entire system of hypothesized relationships is tied into a codified whole.

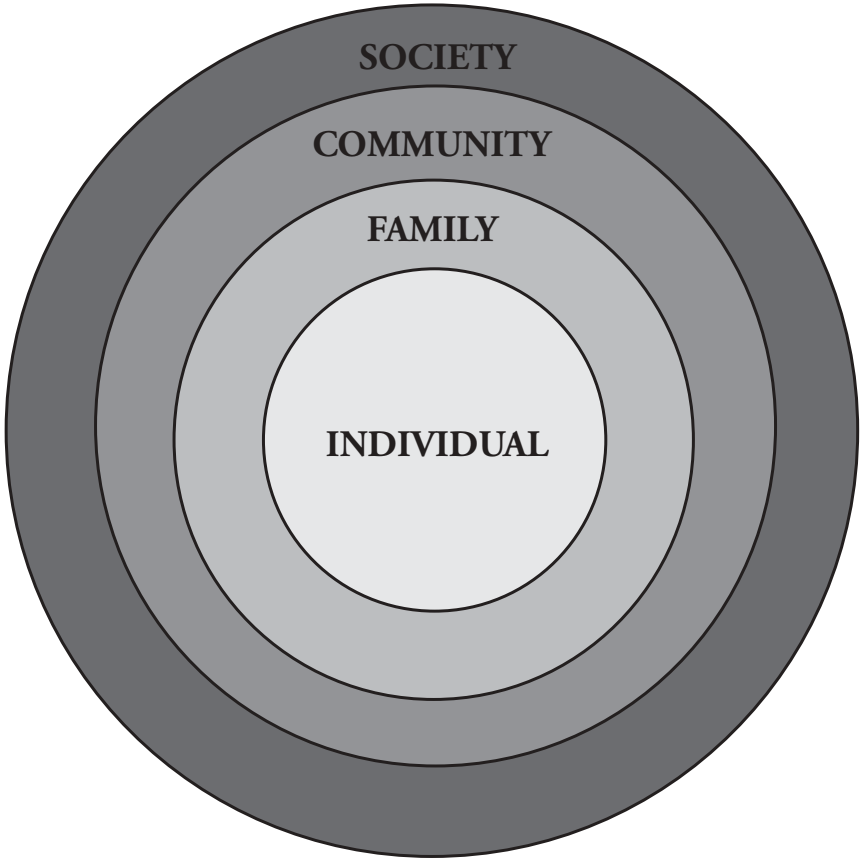


Figure 17.1
Billingsley's "Social Systems" Theory of Black Family Life

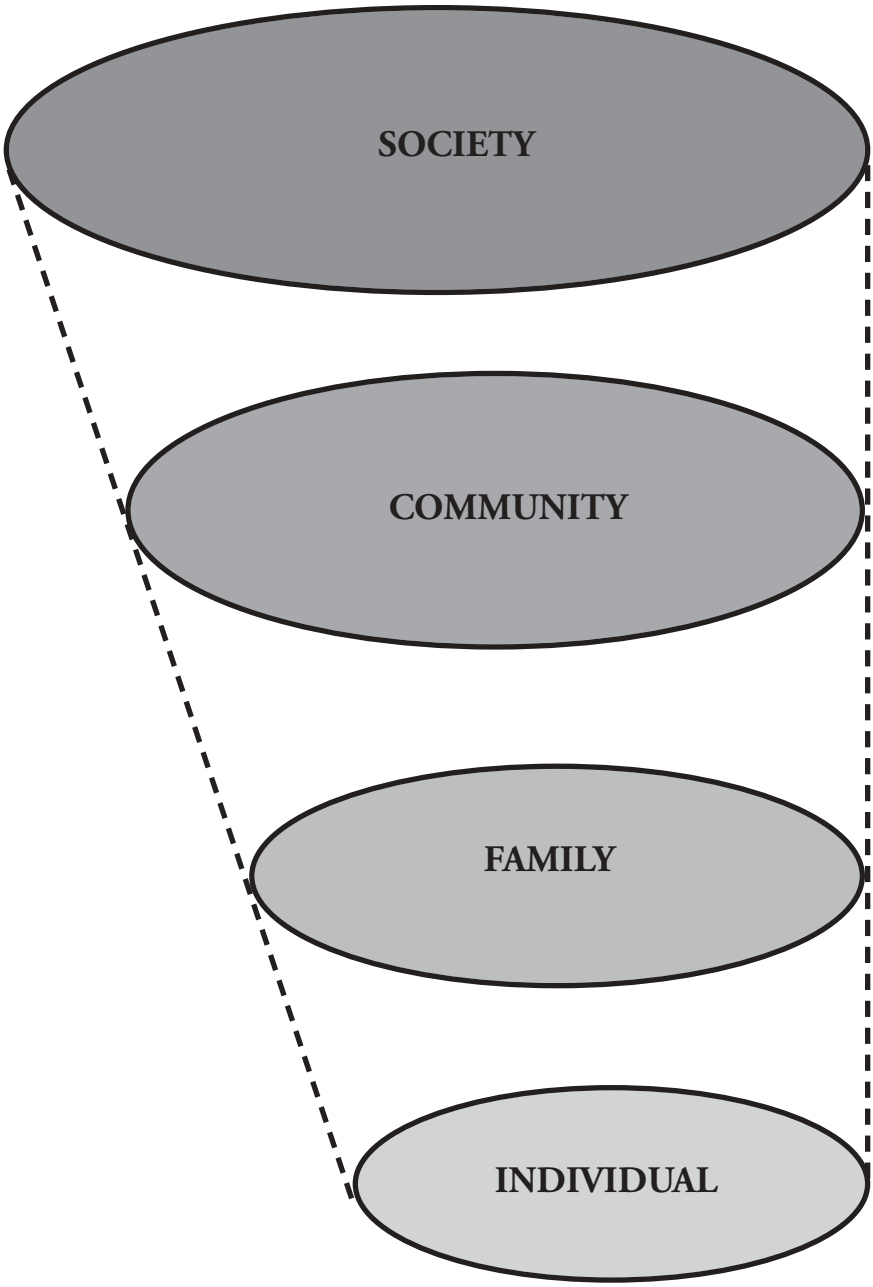


Figure 17.2
Telescopic Inversion of the Concentric Circles (Systems) in Model

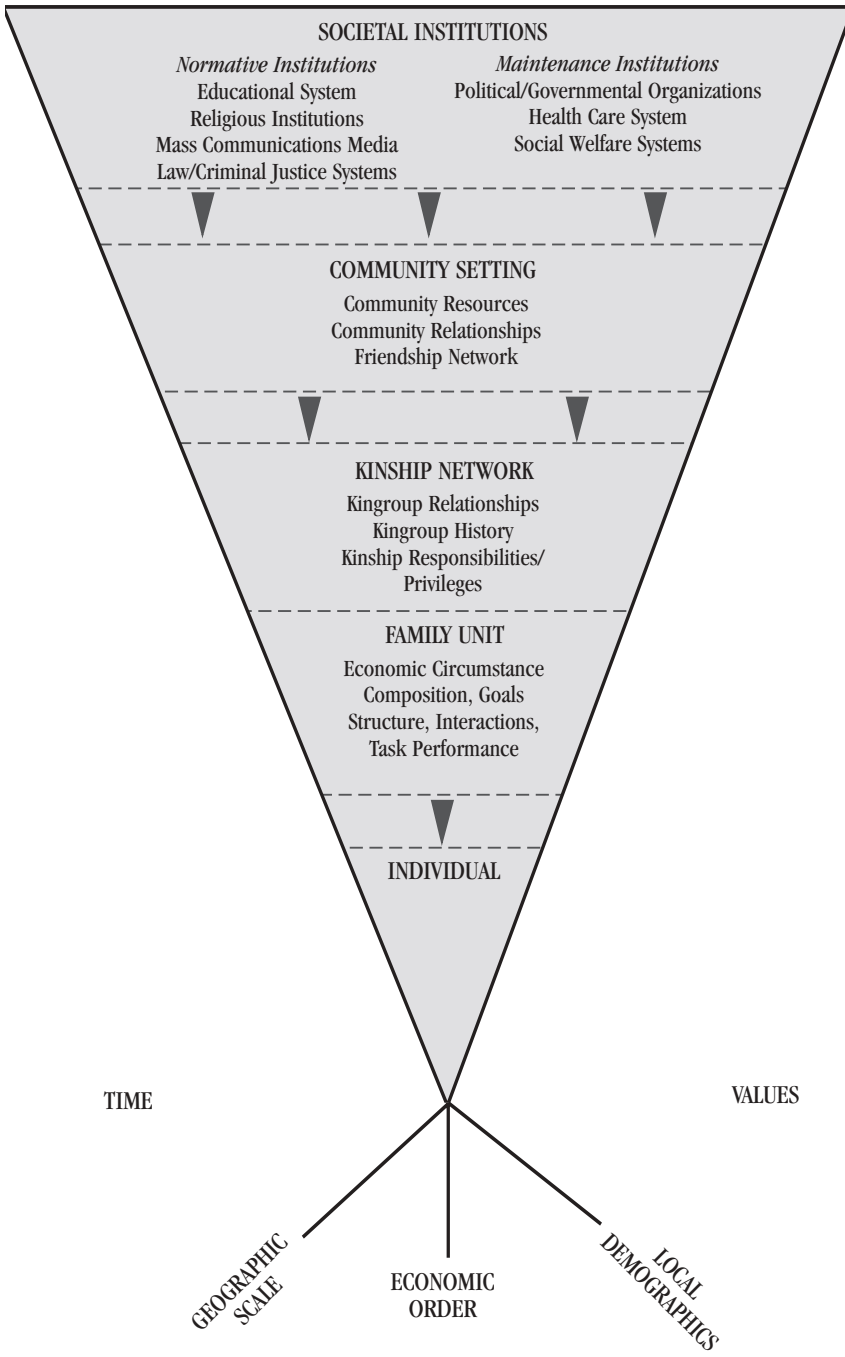


Figure 17.3
The "Black Family Ecological Context" Model

The black family social-ecological context model summarizes the system of relationships believed to determine the nature of black family life in the United States (Figure 3). As an approximation of these causal relationships, the model is flawed in many important respects. For example, it suggests that observed relationships are uni-directional, when in fact we know that these relationships are bi-directional, mutually influencing. By the same token, in its present form the model lacks the detail and specificity normally associated with predictive models. In short, the model is at best a gross approximation of complex linkages, direct and indirect relationships, situational factors and interpersonal exchanges which form the experiential bases of black family life. Nevertheless, this model serves effectively to organize and to orient our thinking about the black family experience along more systematic and encompassing lines. The model also provides a framework within which these complex relationships can be examined.

This model of African-American family life represents causal linkages as moving from larger systems down through successively smaller subsystems. Thus, it suggests that societal institutions (dichotomized into those that perform normative functions and those that perform maintenance functions) influence community settings. Further, community settings influence kinship networks which in turn influence the family units. Finally, individual outcomes are seen as direct products of family units. Clearly the family realities abstracted in this model are involved much more than is shown. There is considerable interpenetration between levels, there are elaborate causal relationships within each level, and there is wide variation across families in terms of how strongly each of the different causal factors influences observed outcomes. Nevertheless, the general patterns outlined can be expected to assert themselves consistently in the construction of black family outcomes. For all families, and for black families in particular, one expects to find societal institution effects being mediated by community setting which, in turn, is mediated by dual levels of the family system (kinship network and family unit).

Once all of the linkages expressed (and implied) in this model have been taken into account, several additional determinants of black family experiences would need to be addressed. These additional factors particularly involve the variation one expects, and indeed finds, to be characteristic of black family experiences across different settings represented by economic status, time, space, and value orientation. Dependent on the historical period, economic class, spatial location and value position of the black families in question, one should expect to see the components in the model combining in distinctive ways.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY

As Hill emphasizes, black children and their families currently face social and economic crises of such magnitude that their very survival is threatened. Spiraling inflation, soaring unemployment, and changing societal priorities greatly diminish the opportunities and quality of life for black families and their children. Social scientists therefore have a special obligation to offer practical recommendations aimed at alleviating the crises currently experienced by too many black (and minority and poor) families and children in this society. I offer these recommendations not as a disinterested, dispassionate, detached scholar, but rather as an African-American professional who is concerned about the futures of our children and of our communities.

Social and behavioral research findings exert profound influence on public policy, which shapes the lives of an inordinate number of black families and children. Too often this simple connection is overlooked. It would be naïve to think that research findings have no consequences for how these key decisionmakers operate. Research findings taught in the classroom, published in popular scholarly journals, reported in the popular media, and discussed over cocktails, shape their ideas of both the appropriate and the possible. In making

decisions that affect the lives of black families and of black people, people draw upon these ideas (in both conscious and unconscious ways). Past research on black children and black families has distorted their realities and has defined them as pathological. As a result, social programs informed by this pejorative research tradition have been less than effective. Public policies intended to help black children have instead often proven harmful.

Ironically, the actions that this agenda calls for echo a similar call made by Allison Davis and John Dollard, University of Chicago, in 1940. In the ensuing five decades, much has changed in the lives of black people; unfortunately, much has also remained the same. There are more black millionaires, physicians, professors, private contractors, and attorneys now than ever before. However, there also continue to be unacceptably high numbers of black children denied adequate health care, equal educational opportunity, and minimal living standards. The following recommendations suggest an action agenda which will insure that black (and minority) families who are currently disadvantaged receive their full benefits from this society. These recommendations are not intended to be all-inclusive. Instead, they present my view of key arenas for corrective action. These recommendations draw extensively from an earlier paper.

POVERTY

African-American families continue to be disproportionately represented among this country's poor. From generation to generation, blacks — compared to whites — earn less, have fewer capital resources, and are caught in systems of economic deprivation. Poverty conditions the life chances and experiences of black children in a variety of ways. In this society, the basic necessities of life — and any frills — are for sale. Those with limited or nonexistent purchasing power are placed therefore at a great disadvantage. Action is required to improve the economic circumstances of black children and their families. Among the actions to be taken are the following: institution of an adequate guaranteed minimum family income; institution of a program of full employment involving the public and private sectors; and the equalization of worker salaries and earnings potential.

HEALTH CARE

African-American children and their families are deprived of adequate health care in this, the world's most medically advanced society. Disproportionate numbers of black children die in infancy, suffer poor nutrition, are not immunized, and die from accidents. Poor access to health care ends many young black lives prematurely and diminishes the quality of existence for others. Action is required to improve the health status and health care access of African-American families. The specific needs include alternative financing of medical and health care services to insure their availability, regardless of the basis of ability to pay; expansion of health care outlets, including the location of health care facilities in inner-city areas and increased recruitment/training of black physicians and health care professionals; and the establishment of comprehensive, preventive health programs emphasizing early and periodic screening/intervention.

EDUCATION

Educational attainment has steadily risen among African Americans. There is reason to believe, however, that the qualitative gains in their education have been less pronounced — certainly the economic returns on the educational gains are lower than for whites. Black children lag behind whites on most objective measures of achievement: their suspension rates are higher, and college entrance rates are lower. The educational experiences of black children

are impaired through their enrollment at schools with larger numbers of under-achieving students, more frequent violence, fewer experienced teachers, and substandard facilities. In order to improve the school experience and educational outcomes for black children, there is a need for alternative financing approaches to eliminate current economic inequities between school districts; the development and implementation of individualized remedial/instructional programs; and the implementation of school accountability systems that establish target achievement goals and assess progress toward these goals.

MEDIA

The electronic media in the form of television and radio exert an influence on African-American children that at times exceeds the influence of parents. Children spend substantial amounts of time absorbing the content of the most recent television programs and the most popular songs. Yet parents and the black community exert at best minimal control over the content of these messages. There is ample evidence that media messages are often detrimental to black children's healthy development. The negative effects include advocacy of violence, sexual indiscriminations, and conspicuous consumerism.

Steps must be taken to maximize the positive effects of media and to minimize any negative effects. There is need for parents to regulate their children's media habits and exposure, and for the community to monitor media broadcasts to encourage positive programming.

CHILD CARE

If there was ever a time when the model of a full-time homemaker/wife had applicability in African-American communities, that time has long since passed. The majority of black mothers who can find jobs are employed outside the home. At the same time, the character of extended family involvements has changed in ways which reduce the viability of these as child care alternatives. The result has been an increased need for child care services by black families. Limited availability of child care options, high costs where these are available, and large numbers of black children in foster care make the provision of child care services to black families necessary. When these facts are recognized, the following requirements become clear: the expansion of low-cost/community-based child care programs to serve the needs of working parents; the institution of training programs and referral resources for child care providers; and the revision of guidelines regulating black child placements in foster homes or group-care facilities.

These are but a few of the many public policy initiatives to be pursued. If implemented, these social policies and other related initiatives should vastly improve the circumstances of African-American families in the U.S. To the extent that family circumstances are improved, we can reasonably expect to see improvements in the quality of life and outcomes for African-American families. This social policy agenda speaks mostly to the responsibility of government for improving black family life. Beyond this lies another set of initiatives that are more properly the responsibility of the black community.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

African-American communities have responsibilities extending to and beyond each of the problem areas above. African Americans must pool and organize resources to insure that, even where the government and larger society fail to fulfill their commitments, the needs of black children and of black families do not go unmet. Self-help activities based in churches, social clubs, private homes, and available public meeting places must become the rule rather than the exception. This is a call for the creation and expansion of community-based tutori-

al programs, social welfare cooperatives, and mutual support organizations of the sort commonly found in black communities at an earlier point in our history. It is a terrible irony that African Americans possess economic resources, educational achievements, and technical skills which would place us among the top 15 countries in the world were we an independent nation. Yet we mobilize the merest fraction of these vast resources in cooperative activities aimed at self-benefit. We continue to depend far too much on others for the fulfillment of our needs and for the protection of our young.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Thirty years ago, D. Patrick Moynihan issued a call for national action to respond to real threats to African-American family life. Citing the declining fraction of households headed by married couples, he forecast the destruction of African-American family and community life unless action took dramatic government. The trends identified by Moynihan have continued. Now nearly half of all black families are headed by a single female. More often than not, these families are mired in poverty and beset by the social problems associated with severe economic deprivation.

Time has proven the trends in African-American family life to be much more complex and elusive than Moynihan predicted. In fact, what has happened since 1965 is a hastening of two trends in black family life and in black communities. On the one hand, many black families have sunk deeper into abject poverty. Associated with their impoverishment is their isolation from the societal mainstream. They and their members are increasingly outside the educational system, without jobs, consigned to high crime areas, leading unproductive lives, and facing limited futures. On the other hand is the group of black families who were able to escape the cycle of deprivation and destruction forecast by Moynihan. These families and their members have moved into areas of American life previously off-limits to black people. With their fantastic success and unrestricted access has come unrivaled social and economic mobility.

Hence, two contrasting realities are presented for contemporary African-American families. Middle-class blacks require little more than the continued commitment of the society to equal opportunity. Given a fair chance, they are, by virtue of their educational, economic, social, and political resources, able to compete successfully. At the other end of the continuum are the poor, urban black families, whose needs are legion. Denied or deprived of gainful employment, adequate educational preparation, and safe, healthy communities, these families find it challenging to maintain even a semblance of normal family life.

The case for national action on behalf of urban poor African American families is indisputable. The nation must mobilize its resources and resolve first to ease and then ultimately to erase the frightening deterioration of viable family and community life among poor, urban African Americans. The problems contributing to this deterioration are not entirely — or sizably — of black people's making; therefore, these problems cannot be left solely to black people to solve. Industrial decline, the proliferation of guns and illegal drugs, the failure of the public school system, and massive unemployment loom large in the equation of black family crisis. African-American families face problems of epic proportions and, unless these problems are solved, the negative effects will continue to be felt by the whole nation. As Billingsley points out, black families have historically nurtured and sustained African Americans under extreme conditions, ranging from enslavement to impoverishment. With critical assistance from government and the rest of society, these families will continue to produce citizens able to help this society advance.

While the case for concerted action concerning research on African-American families is not so sharply drawn, it is nevertheless of weighty importance. The empirical record cries out for correction. Time and time again, it has shown how researchers have distorted black

Black Father, Mother and Child. (©Tim Wright/CORBIS)

family life and misinformed society about its essential elements. The result of these flawed studies has been to cripple society's understanding of African-American families and to hamstring attempts to address the problems which confront these families. It is imperative that additional, more sensitive empirical studies of African-American families be undertaken. Further, these studies need to employ alternative theoretical, methodological and ideological approaches that will help to clarify the socio-ecological context within which African-American families function and to illustrate how these families respond to such constraints. A period of revisionist scholarship is required in order to challenge and to supplant a literature which portrays black families as pathological. The strategy will not be to replace this literature with one that says all is well and perfect with black families in America. Instead, the attempt will be to produce studies to illuminate the essential nature of black family life, showing not only its obvious characteristics but also its subtle variations. From such research will come reliable information to guide attempts to shape social policy that improves the circumstances of African-American families.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

—St. Paul

Table 17.1

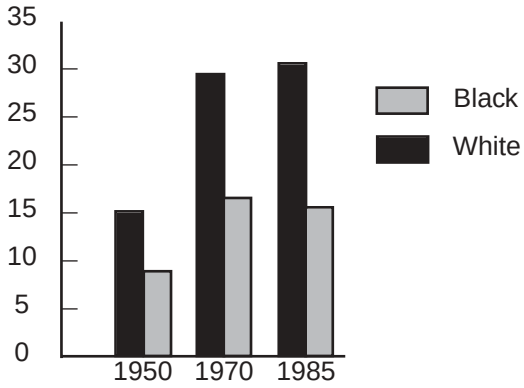
Marital and Family Status, 1960-1985

	1960	1970	1980	1985
% Births to Unmarried Women				
Blacks	22	35	55	60
Whites	2	6	11	14
% Female-Headed Families with Children Under 18				
Blacks	24	33	48	50
Whites	6	9	14	15
% Women (15-44) Living with Husbands				
Blacks	52	42	30	28
Whites	69	61	55	55
% Children Under 18 in Female-headed Families				
Blacks	20	29	44	51
Whites	6	8	14	16

From: Jaynes and Williams, **A Common Destiny,** *p. 522.*

Chart 17.1

Children in Poverty in the United States, 1959-1984



From: Jaynes and Williams, **A Common Destiny,** *p. 24*

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Chapter Eighteen

Black Feminism in the United States

Beverly Guy-Sheftall

The black feminist movement which began to emerge in the mid-1960s is a continuation of both an intellectual and activist tradition which began over a century and a half ago. The argument that African-American women confront both a "woman question and a race problem" captures the essence of black feminist thought at the turn of the century and would reverberate among intellectuals, academics, activists, writers, educators, and community leaders, both male and female for generations. While feminist perspectives have been a persistent and important component of the African-American literary and intellectual tradition since slavery, scholars until fairly recently have focused primarily on the racial perspectives of blacks. This tendency to ignore long years of political struggle aimed at eradicating the multiple oppressions which black women experience resulted in erroneous notions about the relevance of feminism to the black community during the second wave of the women's movement. Revisioning black history with a gender analysis, however, should render obsolete the notion that feminist thinking is alien to African Americans or that they have been misguided imitators of white women.

While black feminism is not a monolithic, static ideology and there has been considerable diversity of thought among African Americans with feminist consciousness going back to the 1800s, certain premises characterize what came to be labeled black feminism: 1) Black women experience a special kind of oppression and suffering in this country which is both racist and sexist because of their dual racial and gender identity; 2) This "double jeopardy" has meant that the problems, concerns, and needs of black women are different in many ways and distinct from those of both white women and black men; 3) black women must struggle for gender equality and black liberation; 4) There is no inherent contradiction in the struggle to eradicate sexism and racism as well as the other "isms" which plague the human community such as classism and heterosexism; 5) black women's unique struggles with respect to racial and sexual politics, their poverty and marginalized status have given them a special view of the world.

A historical perspective on the evolution of feminist consciousness among African-American women is usually thought to have begun with abolition since the catalyst for the emergence of the women's rights movement in the mid-19th century was the movement to abolish slavery. However, for 200 years enslaved African females struggled for their freedom and protested bringing slave children into the world, beatings, involuntary breeding, sexual exploitation by white masters, family separation, debilitating work schedules, sub-standard living conditions, and demeaning stereotypes. A few of their life stories called attention to the

peculiar plight of black women and their strategies for resistance. In her antebellum autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861), Harriet Jacobs publicized her sexual vulnerability and stated unequivocally that "slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own." Covert use of contraceptives, the practice of abortion, and desperate attempts to control the fate of their children, including infanticide, provided slave women some measure of control over their bodies and their reproductive capacity. The most well-documented case of infanticide concerns Margaret Garner who escaped slavery in Kentucky (1856), and during her capture in Cincinnati killed her baby daughter rather than have her returned to her master. This saga inspired Toni Morrison's award-winning novel *Beloved* which was published in 1987.

Manifestations of their race and gender consciousness are also to be found in the sex-segregated, self-help organizations which free black women formed in the early 1800s because it was difficult for them to become leaders in organizations with black men or because they were denied membership in white women's groups. It was also easier for black women to attend to their own political, cultural, or intellectual agendas with the establishment of separate literary, debating, abolitionist, or other reform organizations. Located primarily in the northeast, one of the earliest of these organizations was the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of Boston, founded in 1831. Free women of color were also responsible for organizing in 1832 the first female abolitionist group, the Salem, Massachusetts Female Antislavery Society. The racially mixed Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1833, included several women from the famous Forten family. Though ignored by historians attempting to document the development of feminism in the mid-19th century, black women's self-help, abolitionist and other reform activities also contributed to a climate of discontent which anticipated the historic women's rights gathering at Seneca Falls in 1848.

In 1832 Maria W. Stewart (1803-1879), a free black from Connecticut with abolitionist and feminist impulses, delivered four public lectures in Boston, the first one at the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society. She was probably the first African-American woman to speak publicly in defense of women's rights though she is remembered primarily as the first American-born woman of any race to lecture publicly to racially mixed audiences of women and men. Though she spoke on a variety of issues relevant to the black community — literacy, self- determination, abolition, economic empowerment, and racial unity — she admonished black women in particular to break free from stifling gender definitions and reach their fullest potential by pursuing formal education and careers outside the home, especially teaching; she was also adamant in her belief that black women should assume leadership roles within their communities, all of which were familiar themes in what we would now identify as a black feminist agenda during the 19th century. Passionate in her defense of black womanhood, she queried: "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?...Possess the spirit of independence… Sue for your rights and privileges."

She was probably also the first to call for a school by and for black women during a time when education for black men assumed a greater priority. Discouraged by criticism from black men about her inappropriate female behavior (political activism and lecturing in public), however, Stewart left the lecture circuit a year later in 1833, but not without defending her sex in the most glowing terms by alluding to historical and Biblical precedents in "Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston": "What if I am a woman…Did St. Paul but know of our wrongs and deprivations, I presume he would make no objections to our pleading in public for our rights…in the 15th century…we might then have seen women preaching and mixing themselves in controversies. Women occupying the chairs of Philosophy and Justice; women writing in Greek, and studying in Hebrew. Nuns were poet-

esses, and women of quality Divines…. Why cannot we become divines and scholars?" She also warned against a paradoxical problem which would plague the black community for generations — preaching against prejudice in the white community but being discriminatory in their own backyards: "...let us no longer talk of prejudice, till prejudice becomes extinct at home. Let us no longer talk of opposition, till we cease to oppose our own." She continued her activism, however, after leaving the lecture circuit by publishing a collection of her work in 1835 *(Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart)*, attending the 1837 Women's Anti-Slavery Convention, and joining a black female literary society in New York.

During the 1830s and 1840s other American women, like Stewart, began lecturing against slavery and found that in so doing they had to defend their own right to speak in public, which in turn led them to demand their own emancipation. At the Convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1839, doubt was cast upon women's right to participate in the convention, so a resolution was proposed that hereafter women delegates would have votes like the men. A majority of the male delegates were opposed, but the women present insisted on voting and their votes gave the resolution a majority. In 1840 the American delegates to the World's Anti-Slavery Convention arrived in London to find the women delegates among them again excluded from participation. While seated in the gallery behind a curtain with the rest of the women, Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott felt the striking similarity between themselves as white women and black slaves, a common theme in early white feminist discourse. During the ten days of frustration that followed, they became friends and agreed to hold a women's rights convention on their return to America. Eight years later in 1848 the Seneca Falls Convention was held, most of whose participants were abolitionists. This historic event is considered the beginning of the women's movement in the U.S.

While Frederick Douglass, the most prominent black abolitionist and women's rights male, believed that the anti-slavery movement was doing much for the elevation and improvement of women, he understood fully the need for an independent, organized movement to achieve equal rights for women. On July 14, 1848, his *North Star* carried the announcement of the Seneca Falls Convention. A constant reminder to his readers of his commitment to the rights of women was the slogan which appeared in an early issue of the *North Star* — "Right is of No Sex." At the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, when it appeared that Elizabeth Cady Stanton's resolution for woman suffrage was headed for defeat, Douglass at a critical juncture asked for the floor and delivered an eloquent plea on behalf of women's right to vote. The resolution was then put to a vote and carried by a small margin.

Involvement on the part of black women in women's rights struggles goes back to Sojourner Truth, perhaps the most frequent black female at women's rights conventions in the 19th century and the most revered early black feminist. In 1850 she attended the second women's rights convention in Salem, Ohio (as did Douglass), and spoke at the third women's rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her now controversial "Ar'n't I A Woman" speech, delivered at the Akron, Ohio, women's rights convention in 1851, is an eloquent statement of black feminist thought. Some of the delegates to the convention, according to Frances Gage in her description of the gathering some 12 years later, urged that Sojourner be prohibited from speaking, fearing that abolitionists would harm their cause. When she seized the platform, Sojourner directed her remarks against the previous speaker, a clergyman who had ridiculed the weakness and helplessness of women, who should, therefore, not be entrusted with the vote. While their first interest was the anti-slavery struggle, two other abolitionist black women were active in the women's rights movement during these early years. They were Frances E.W. Harper, novelist, poet, and journalist, and Sarah Remond, sister of abolitionist orator Charles Remond who sat in the balcony with the women at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention meeting in London to protest sexism.

Sojourner Truth. (Bettmann/CORBIS)

In 1866, Douglass and Charles Remond were among the vice-presidents chosen for the newly formed Equal Rights Association (ERA). Later in the year at an Albany meeting, Douglass warned the ERA that it was in danger of becoming a women's rights association only. At the first annual meeting of the ERA in 1867, Sojourner Truth spoke twice. During one of these talks, she addressed herself to the rights of women, especially black women: "There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women; and if colored men get their rights, and not colored women… there will be a bad time about it… I want women to have their rights." By the fall of 1873, even though the resentment over the failure of the 15th Amendment to enfranchise women was still being felt, the leaders of the woman suffrage movement were anxious to reconcile their differences with Douglass. The actual split in the women's movement had taken place in 1869, a crucial turning point in its history. At the proceedings of the American Equal Rights Association Convention in New York in 1869, the famous debate between Frederick Douglass and the white feminists present took place. Here he argued for the greater urgency of the race issue and defended the positions of abolitionists that now was the Negro hour and women's rights could wait. The great danger was that linking woman suffrage with Negro suffrage at this point would seriously lessen the chances of securing the ballot for black men, and for the Negro, he reiterated, the ballot was an urgent necessity. When asked whether this was true also about black women, he quickly responded, "Yes, yes, yes . . . but not because she is a woman, but because she is black." Frances E.W. Harper supported Douglass, while Sojourner Truth supported the white feminist position, believing that if black men got the vote they would continue to dominate black women. Following this meeting, Stanton and Anthony organized the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) for women only. They did so in the belief that it was largely due to the male leadership of the suffrage movement that women's interests had been betrayed. In November 1869 in Cleveland, a second organization called the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) was organized with Lucy Stone as chair. Peace was restored in the 1876 convention of the NWSA during which Douglass was told that his help was needed in the continuing struggle for women's rights. Though he was still somewhat bitter about racist remarks made about black males during the battle over the 15th Amendment, he announced that he was still willing to work for the cause. Once the reconciliation had taken place, he was again a familiar figure at women's rights conventions.

An examination of the extraordinary saga of black women in publishing during this period provides another mirror on their feminist vision. Mary Shadd Cary's (1823-1893) pioneering publishing efforts in the 1850s mark the beginning of black women's leadership roles in journalism since she was the first black female newspaper editor in North America. Shadd, known primarily for her advocacy of the political and economic autonomy of blacks, was a writer, teacher, editor, lawyer, nationalist, abolitionist and suffragist. Born to free abolitionist parents in Delaware, the young Mary was raised in a political household and spent her entire life struggling for the rights of blacks and women. She migrated to Canada with her brother after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 and published *A Plea for Emigration, or Notes on Canada West, in its Moral, Social and Political Aspect* (1852), a guide for fugitive slaves in the U.S. about what to expect in Canada. A year later she embarked upon a journalism career and solicited the help of Samuel Ringgold Ward, abolitionist and fugitive slave, in the founding of the Provincial Freeman whose motto was "Self Reliance is the True Road to Independence." Critical of the anti-slavery tactics of some black male leaders, she also accused them of sexism and unethical behavior. After the death of her husband she returned to the U.S. in 1863, started a school for black children in Washington, D.C., wrote for Frederick Douglass's *The New National Era,* and became an outspoken abolitionist on the lecture circuit. She also became the first black woman lawyer in the U.S., graduating from Howard Law School in 1870. Shortly thereafter, she won a case before the House of Representatives Judiciary

Committee and was granted the right to vote, a privilege few women during Reconstruction had in federal elections. In 1880 she founded The Colored Women's Progressive Franchise Association in Washington, DC., one of the earliest women's rights organization for African-American women. Though gaining suffrage for black women was the major objective, the Association's 20-point agenda included broadening occupations for black women and establishing newspapers which black women would control.

Mary Church Terrell. (Library of Congress)

The black women's club movement which emerged on the national level in the 1890s and has been treated by scholars primarily within the context of racial uplift, must be analyzed as a manifestation of race and gender obligations on the part of black women. They were established not only because white women's clubs prohibited their membership, except in New England, but also because black women felt they had unique problems to solve. When the First National Conference of Colored Women convened in Boston on July 29, 1895, a number of items were on the agenda — temperance, higher education, domestic questions, morality, education for girls and boys.

The specific catalyst for this first national convention came as a result of a letter that Florence Belgarnie, an officer of the Anti-Lynching Committee in London, received from John Jacks, American newspaper editor and president of the Missouri Press Association. Angry over her anti-lynching activities, which had been encouraged by the crusade of black activist Ida Wells-Barnett during her speaking tours in England, Jacks wrote Belgarnie a letter in which he defended the white South by maligning black women for their immorality. Belgarnie in turn sent a copy of the letter to Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a member of the largely white New England Women's Club and founder of Woman's Era Club for black women. In 1895 she convened a group of black women at the Charles Street A.M.E. Church in Boston, resulting in the formation of the National Federation of Afro-American Women. Later she distributed the letter to black women's clubs throughout the nation and called for a national conference which eventually led to the formation of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). In 1896 the Association was established when the National Federation of Afro-American Women, whose president was Margaret Murray Washington, and the National League of Colored Women, whose president was Mary Church Terrell combined, with Terrell becoming NACW's first national president.

At this historic gathering, Mrs. Mahammitt, a delegate of the Omaha Women's Club, stressed the importance of vindicating the honor of black women and denouncing Jacks. The illustrious group of women present included Margaret Murray Washington, second wife of Booker T. Washington; Anna G. Brown, widow of the well-known writer William Wells Brown; Selena Sloan Butler of Atlanta, Georgia, who some years later would organize the black Parent Teachers Association; and Victoria Earle Matthews, journalist, who in 1897 founded the White Rose Industrial Mission for the purpose of assisting black females who migrated to New York from the South.

A pivotal moment in black women's publishing history and the coming of age politically for clubwomen, occurred with the founding of *Woman's Era.* In 1893 Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin had founded the New Era Club in Boston, and initiated a monthly publication, *Woman's Era,* the most conspicuous work of the organization and eventually designated the official organ of the NACW. The first issue came out March 24, 1894, and 24 issues were published through January 1897. Since it was founded, edited and published by Ruffin, who was active in the Massachusetts woman suffrage movement, it is not surprising to find in the publication a strong advocacy of woman suffrage, especially for black women.

The front page of the first issue carried a portrait and feature article on the women's rights leader Lucy Stone, which set the tone for the publication. The first issue also contained an article on the closing meetings of the New England Woman Suffrage Association of which Ruffin was a member. An August 1894 issue contained an editorial dealing with woman suffrage. It is apparent from this early issue that the editors wanted to make their readers aware of the importance of black women's right to vote. There was also strong advocacy for black women entering the public arena in order to solve their unique problems. An awareness of the dilemma that black women faced as a result of the "double jeopardy" of race and sex is apparent throughout *Women's Era,* the most significant outlet for the expression of their political views and aspirations during the "Progressive" era.

Anna Julia Haywood Cooper. (Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University)

In 1892, clubwoman Anna Julia Cooper (1859-1964) published *A Voice From the South by a black Woman of the South,* the first book-length feminist analysis of the condition of African Americans. This collection of essays, many of which were speeches delivered to black organizations, is also an enlightened and progressive discussion of the oppressed status of black women. Not content with simply describing the plight of black females, she argued that they need to speak out for themselves and stop allowing others, including black men, to speak for them. Commenting on the black woman's unique position, she advanced the argument of "double jeopardy," since black women were confronted by both a woman question and a race problem.

Cooper continued throughout her life to write about women's rights in general, but her major focus was always black women's liberation. She was especially concerned about the accessibility of higher education for black women. She also felt that elevating the status of black women would uplift the entire black race, a persistent theme in the writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and Mary Church Terrell, all of whom consistently espoused black feminist ideas in their speeches and articles. Cooper was critical of black men who were unsupportive of the struggle for black female equality and she frequently spoke at black male gatherings about the importance of women in the struggle for racial uplift. In fact, she believed that women, because of their special qualities, should be in the forefront of the fight for racial equality. Though she was aware of the double burden of race and sex which was peculiar to black women, she also felt that black women shared many problems with black males, because of racial oppression, that white women did not share with their men. Cooper was analyzed relationships between black men and women and the problematic nature of the relationship, which links her to contemporary black feminists.

In the 1920s and '30s, Nannie Burroughs (1879-1961), who founded the National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington in 1909, continued to espouse the cause of black women in a number of ways. Her concern for the plight of black working class women, particularly domestic servants, resulted in her organizing the National Association of

Wage Earners in 1920. Her intense feelings of racial pride were manifested in her rejection of black emulation of white standards of beauty and she accused her sisters of "color phobia" if they used hair straighteners and skin bleachers. She is perhaps best known for her leadership in the Woman's Convention (WC) Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention (NBC), the largest membership organization of black women in the U.S. An outspoken advocate of black and women's empowerment and the rights of black Baptist women, she was particularly outraged about women's disenfranchisement and argued that woman suffrage would help to eradicate male dominance and sexual exploitation. After the l9th Amendment was passed in 1919, she continued her political activism for black women's empowerment and helped to organize the National League of Republican Colored Women in 1924 and became its first president.

During this same period the International Council of Women of the Darker Races, which sometimes met in Washington, DC at Nannie Burroughs' school, was spawned by the racial uplift impulses of the black women's club movement. Organized by several black women, most notably Margaret Murray Washington, founding mother of the national black women's club movement and President of NACW from 1914-1918, its purpose was to study the condition and status of women of color and children throughout the world. Like Cooper who spoke about the Chinese practice of foot-binding among women and Muslim harems on the first page of *A Voice from the South*, they were aware of cultural differences throughout the world where women were concerned. This forward looking organization is reminiscent of recent attempts by contemporary black feminists to establish linkages with other women of color internationally and to struggle for the elimination of sexism and racism on a global level.

A frequently overlooked aspect of black women's activism during this period, especially within the context of Pan-Africanism or nationalism, was their battle against gender oppression. The explicitly feminist and visionary writing of Amy Jacques Garvey (1896-1973), Marcus Garvey's second wife, is particularly important in this regard because of her potential impact on thousands of working class urban blacks involved with the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which her husband organized in 1914. As editor from 1924-1927 of the Women's Page of the *Negro World*, UNIA's weekly newspaper, Amy wrote passionately in her column "Our Women and What They Think" about the evils of imperialism, materialism, racism, capitalism, and the interlocking race, class, and gender oppression which black and other women experienced globally, particularly in colonial contexts. She believed that the women's movement was one of the most significant struggles in human history and that the emancipation of women was imperative. She critiqued the patriarchal family throughout the world and called for women to participate in all spheres of public life despite their important duties as mothers. She also felt that women were central to the success of black liberation struggles both in the U.S. and internationally and that they must fight to end imperialist domination as well as their own oppression within their communities. She was especially confident that black women, because of the internal strengths they had developed as a result of perpetual hardships, would be crucial to racial progress, though she lamented their devaluation.

A woman of courage, she was very critical of black men's tyrannical and sexist treatment of women, especially within the UNIA. Echoing Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper, she espoused a revolutionary, feminist vision of the world in which women would set things right because of their more humane inclinations: "You [men] had your day at the helm of the world, and a pretty mess you have made of it...and perhaps women's rule will usher in the era of real brotherhood, when national and racial lines will disappear, leaving mankind in peace and harmony one with another." She also had a special warning for black men: "...watch your step! Ethiopia's queens will reign again and her Amazons protect her shores and people. Strength your shaking knees and move forward, or we will displace you and lead on to victo-

ry and glory." Concerned about the status of women globally, particularly in Asia and Africa, she applauded Egyptian women's removal of the veil and women's political gains in India, Russia and China.

Advocating for birth control in order to avoid involuntary motherhood, was another manifestation black feminist agenda item during the 1920s and '30s, though it would remain controversial given the black community's concern about genocide. It is important to point out that the covert use among slave women of contraceptives and abortifacients was perhaps the earliest manifestation of black women exercising reproductive freedom, a major demand of contemporary feminism. Limiting the size of families was a deliberate strategy of some women for improving the economic viability and standard of living in the black community, and by 1900, black women had significantly lowered their birth rate as well as infant mortality. Black women also had a feminist perspective on excessive childbearing, linking it to burdensome physical and mental problems, and sterilization abuse. The Women's Political Association of Harlem, founded in 1918, was the first black organization to advocate birth control. Though the National Urban League and the NAACP supported family planning, this issue sparked controversy within the black community (among Garveyites for example) as nationalist concerns about racial extinction and traditional male notions about women's primary role as mothers clashed with feminist demands for sexual autonomy among black women. There was a range of attitudes among black men on this issue, however, including William E.B. Du Bois who argued in "The Damnation of Women (1925)" that women must be free to choose motherhood. Many black women in Harlem also supported Margaret Sanger's establishing a birth control clinic there, though in the 1980s Angela Davis would critique her racism.

In the 1960s, black feminist struggle came to the forefront in a much more conscious manner, mainly as a result of the failure of the civil rights, black Nationalist, and women's rights organizations to address the special needs and concerns of black women, and heightened consciousness about sexism because of their experiences within the Movement. Some black women in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were angered by the sexist behavior of SNCC men and came to realize that they must battle racism and gender oppression. In 1964 a group of black and white women led by Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, former Spelman student, Freedom Rider and eventually SNCC executive secretary until her untimely death of cancer in 1967, wrote a position paper on the Movement's sexist treatment of women entitled SNCC Position Paper No. 24, "Women of the Movement," which is considered one of the earliest manifestations of the modern women's movement. Septima Clark, SCLC's director of education, later criticized the sexist behavior of the male leadership in SCLC, having been influenced by the National Organization of Women (NOW) which she joined in 1968 because she resented southern men's control of women. Clark's autobiography *Ready From Within* (1986), written many years later, revealed that SCLC men "thought that women were sex symbols and had no contributions to make," though while a staff member she was oblivious to their sexism (Crawford 195).

The publication in 1970 of Toni Cade's *The Black Woman: An Anthology,* Shirley Chisholm's autobiography *Unbossed and Unbossed,* Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Audre Lorde's *Cables to Rage* signalled a literary awakening among black women and the beginning of a clearly defined black women's liberation movement which would have different priorities than those of white feminists and generate considerable debate, even hostility, within the black community. Cade's anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-imperialist agenda captures the essence of black feminism: conduct a comparative study of women's roles in the Third World; debunk myths of the black matriarch and "the evil black bitch"; study black women's history and honor woman warriors such as Harriet Tubman and Fannie Lou Hamer; do oral histories of ordinary black women (migrant workers, quilters, UNIA grandmothers); study sexuality; establish linkages with other women of color globally.

The collection includes former SNCC activist Frances Beale's now classic essay on the "double jeopardy" of black women which highlights their sexual and economic exploitation, the inappropriateness of white models of womanhood, black male sexism, sterilization abuse of women of color globally, abortion rights, and Sojourner Truth's 1851 women's rights speech. She also voices her disapproval of black nationalist demands that women be subordinate to men and their assumption that women's most important contribution to the revolution is having babies. "To assign women the role of housekeeper and mother while men go forth into battle is a highly questionable doctrine to maintain."

In 1973 the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) would emerge, in part as a reminder to the black liberation movement that "there can't be liberation for half a race." Activist lawyer Flo Kennedy and Margaret Sloan, one of the founding editors of *Ms.* magazine, decided to convene a small gathering of black feminists in May so that they could discuss their experiences within the racist Women's Movement and what it meant to be black, female, and feminist. In their statement of purpose, they objected to the women's movement being seen as white and their involvement in it as disloyal to the race. Emphasizing black women's need for self-definition, they identified racism from without and sexism from within as destructive to the black community. This small gathering in May 1973 consisted of 30 women — lawyers, welfare rights workers, housewives, domestics, leaders of various organizations, and other professional women. Plans for a national conference included counteracting negative media portrayals of the women's movement as well as erroneous assertions about the lack of black women's interest in feminism.

Following the May meeting a coordinating council of seven women was established with Margaret Sloan and Jane Galvin-Lewis, Deputy Director of the Women's Action Group, assuming the major leadership role. The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) officially began November 30, 1973 at an Eastern Regional Conference in New York City at St. John the Divine Church. This was an historic gathering of the first explicitly black feminist organization committed to the eradication of sexism, racism, and heterosexism. Workshops focused on a variety of issues — child care, the church, welfare, women's liberation, lesbianism, prisons, education, addiction, work, female sexuality, and domestic violence. Among those present were Shirley Chisholm, Alice Walker, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Flo Kennedy, and Margaret Sloan, NBFO's first and only president. Unfortunately, the organization was short-lived because of limited financial resources, inadequate staff, internal strife, and inability to attract large numbers of mainstream black women.

A year after the founding meeting, the Boston chapter of NBFO decided to form a more radical organization, according to lesbian feminist writer Barbara Smith, and named itself in 1975 the Combahee River Collective after Harriet Tubman's "military campaign" in South Carolina (1863) which freed nearly 800 slaves. After meeting informally for three years and doing intense consciousness raising (the major strategy for feminist organizing in the '70s), a black feminist manifesto was issued in 1977 which foregrounded sexuality and asserted that "sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in black women's lives as the politics of class and race." Emphasizing the "simultaneity" of racial, gender, heterosexual, and class oppression in the lives of black and other women of color, they affirmed their connection to an activist tradition among black women going back to the 19th century as well as to black liberation struggles of the sixties. However, they were painfully aware of the failure of progressive movements to make the eradication of black women's oppression a major priority and believed that "the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us." Though they refer unashamedly to themselves as feminists and lesbians, they also objected to the lesbian separatism of radical white feminists. While affirming their solidarity with progressive black men, they also acknowledged their struggles with them around sexism. It was also apparent to the Collective that many black men were opposed to feminism, believing it to be divisive and a

detraction from their own struggles. While embracing the feminist principle that the personal is political, they also called attention to the critical importance of race and class in feminist theorizing which white women avoided. It would take another decade for these insights to be taken seriously by mainstream feminist theorists, however.

Despite the difficulty of sustaining a socialist black feminist organization with lesbian leadership for six years, they worked untiringly on a variety of "revolutionary" issues — -pro choice, rape, prison reform, sterilization abuse, violence against women, health care, and racism within the white women's movement. They also understood the importance of coalition building and worked with other women of color, white feminists and progressive men. The seven retreats they organized provided a safe space for black feminists throughout the country to interact. As important was their breaking the silence about homophobia within the black community and providing opportunities for black women with different sexual orientations to work together.

In 1975 Michelle Wallace wrote an article for the *Village Voice* entitled "A black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood," and later caused a storm of controversy among black academics and activists with the publication of *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1978), which attempted to analyze sexism within the black community and the civil rights movement. Wallace argued that the new black Movement, a struggle for black men's lost manhood, asserted black male rights at the expense of black women who were now in the grips of "black Macho," of which misogyny was an integral part. She also described black women's invisibility in the civil rights movement and their need to attack the Women's Liberation movement in order not to alienate black men.

Echoing Wallace, the August 27, 1979 issue of *Newsweek* chronicled a new black struggle which underscored intraracial tensions based on gender: "It's the newest wrinkle in the black experience in America — a growing distrust, if not antagonism, between black men and women that is tearing marriages apart and fracturing personal relationships." This "wake-up call" came on the heels of Ntozake Shange's award-winning Broadway play "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuff" (1976) and Michele Wallace's controversial book *black Macho*, both of whom were demonized among large segments of the black community.

The issue of sexual politics within the African-American community became a hotly debated topic also in black publications such as *The black Scholar, Freedomways,* and *black Books Bulletin,* and provided the catalyst for the founding of a short-lived bimonthly magazine, *black Male/Female Relationships* by Nathan and Julia Hare. *black Scholar* would provide the most important outlet for the articulation of ideas about the explosive subject of sexism within the black community which Wallace and Shange had unmasked in their controversial writings. The April 1973 issue of *black Scholar* on "black Women's Liberation" led the way followed by the March 1975 issue on "The black Woman," the 1979 "black Sexism Debate" issue, and the 1986 "black Women and Feminism" issue. Robert Staples' essay "The Myth of black Macho: A Response to Angry black Feminists," which appeared in the March/April 1979 issue, was a feminist-bashing response to Wallace and Shange whom he accused of black male bashing; it stimulated a Readers Forum in the subsequent May/June 1979 issue and the battle lines were drawn. The editorial for this special issue acknowledged in very strong terms a crisis in black male/female relationships and the need to understand its origins and dynamics as well as struggle for reconciliation: "black feminists have raised just criticisms of black male sexism…. We believe that the effort to clarity the nature of black male/female relationships is an important step in the process of re-uniting our people and revitalizing the struggle against oppression…the problems of black male/female relationships are neither new nor solely the creation of the white media."

A decade later, the controversy continued and grew more virulent, the most obvious manifestations of which were loud and angry litanies, especially among black professional

men, about the portrayal of black male characters in the fiction of contemporary black women writers. Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1982) and Steven Spielberg's film adaptation sparked the most vitriolic responses. Shahrazad Ali's self-published The *Blackman's Guide to Understanding the blackwoman* (1990) was one of the most disturbing publications during this decade-and-a-half-old family battle and is one of the most blatantly misogynist and racist texts to appear in print during this period.

Explicitly black feminist publications also emerged during this period amidst rancorous debate within the black community about the relevance of the contemporary women's movement and its feminist agendas for black women. One of the most important black feminist intellectuals to emerge was Bell Hooks whose pioneering monograph, *Ain't I A Woman: black Women and Feminism (*1981) delineated the impact of sexism on the lives of black women; analyzed the devaluation of black womanhood, both historically and contemporaneously; and discussed the persistence of racism in the women's movement and the involvement of black women in struggles to achieve equality for women even when they were discouraged from doing so by various segments of the white and black communities. The chapter on "Sexism and the black Female Experience," advanced the new thesis that slavery, a reflection of a patriarchal and racist social order not only oppressed black men but defeminized slave women. Over the next decade and a half she would become the most prolific among a group of black feminist writers which included Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Alice Walker, Gloria Joseph publishing eight feminist texts on a broad range of issues. She would also help to redefine feminism as a broad political movement to end all forms of domination: "...feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels — sex, race, and class, to name a few — and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires.

Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press was founded for the purpose of publishing mainly feminist women of color. The first explicitly black feminist periodical devoted elusively to the experiences of women of African descent in the U.S. and throughout the world was founded in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1984 and hosted by Spelman College's Women's Research and Resource Center. *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on black Women* would provide a major outlet for black feminist perspectives on a variety of issues including mother daughter relationships in the black community, health, science and technology, and the situation of women in rural Africa.

Despite their commitment to feminism, however, some black women continued to be alienated by the term. As an alternative to "feminist," the term "womanist" became current and preferred by many in the early l980s following the publication of Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) where "womanist" appeared for the first time as a more culturally appropriate way to refer to black feminists or feminists of color. This new label recalled a black folk expression of mothers admonishing their daughters to refrain from "womanish" behavior. In Walker's world view, "womanists" were women who loved other women and men (sexually or nonsexually), prefer women's culture, are committed to the survival of the entire group, and are serious, responsible, "love struggle, love the folk, and loves herself." Wanting to differentiate themselves from mainstream feminists, Africana women scholars, though critical also of patriarchy and sexism, advocated a broader-based "feminism" which took into consideration profound differences among women and their experience of gender because of race, ethnicity, culture, class, and a number of other variables.

President George Bush's 1991 nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court and Prof. Anita Hill's subsequent allegations of sexual harassment, which resulted in televised hearings for three days in October, sparked perhaps the most profound intraracial tensions around sexual politics that the modern African-American community had ever expe-

rienced. Despite Hill's allegations that Thomas had sexually harassed her while she worked under him at the Department of Education and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), on October 16 the Senate confirmed, 52-48, Clarence Thomas as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, replacing outgoing Thurgood Marshall.

A month later, a historic statement opposing the racist and sexist treatment of Anita Hill appeared in the November 17, 1991, issue of *The New York Times*, entitled "African-American Women in Defense of Ourselves," which was reminiscent of media events surrounding the 1895 gathering of black women in Boston. One thousand six hundred forty two black women reminded the nation of Thomas's persistent failure, despite his own racial history and professional opportunities, to respond to the urgency of civil rights for disadvantaged groups in this country. Furthermore, the statement called attention to a long history of sexual abuse and stereotyping of black women as "immoral, insatiable, perverse," and the failure of Congress to take seriously Hill's sexual harassment charges as an attack on the collective character of black women (Chrisman and Allen, 292). Though black female voices were conspicuously absent as commentators during the Thomas/Hill hearings, a number of important statements by progressive black women, many of whom are feminists, found their way in print in the aftermath of the controversial hearings. These included a forum on the hearings in a special issue of *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on black Women;* a collection of essays edited by Toni Morrison entitled *Race-ing Justice, Engendering Power;* and a broad range of essays and documents published by *The black Scholar* collective entitled *Court of Appeal: The black Community Speaks Out on the Racial and Sexual Politics of Thomas Vs. Hill* (1992).

Though it provoked unprecedented anger within the black community, perhaps the most significant outcome of the Thomas/Hill saga according to historian Paula Giddings is that a mandate on gender, particularly a "sexual discourse unmediated by the question of racism," occurred for the first time among the black masses. In other words, Hill's public disclosure of a black-on-black sexual crime provided the catalyst for a broad-based, enlightened discussion of gender issues which has enormous potential for resolving a number of problems relating to sexual politics, male privilege, and unequal power relations within the black community. Hill's example indicated to black women that they need no longer remain silent under the guise of racial solidarity about the abuse they suffer from black men.

In January 1994, the largest gathering of black feminist scholars and activists took place at MIT during a national conference on "black Women in the Academy: Defending Our Name, 1894-1994." One hundred years later, over 2,000 mostly black women came again to Boston, having been reminded by conference organizers that black women were also under attack in 1894 during many public forums for their supposed immorality. In the 1990s black women also found themselves the targets of public attack, much of which was generated by the Thomas/Hill hearings and propaganda associated with the issue of welfare reform and "family values." In addition, two prominent black academic women with liberal politics, Johnnetta Cole and Laini Guinier (both of whom were keynoters at MIT), had been viciously attacked by the Right which resulted in both of them being abandoned as appointees of the Clinton Administration. In the aftermath of the Thomas/Hill hearings, black women witnessed rancorous public dialogue about their character and points of view which sparked the formation of an organization, African-American Women in Defense of Ourselves. Reminiscent of the 1890s, black feminism, which foregrounds the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality, would provide a context around which African women could again rally.

More than any other episode in recent memory, including the responses to *black Macho, For Colored Girls* and *The Color Purple,* the Thomas/Hill saga unmasked problematic gender attitudes within the black community and in some cases outright misogyny. Because Hill had violated a deeply held cultural taboo — that racial dirty linen shouldn't be aired in public — she came to epitomize black female treachery in breaking the silence about objec-

tionable black male behavior. For over a decade black women had been labeled traitors among some segments of the community because of their advocacy of feminism or associations with white feminists, as Hill was accused of doing. Despite the criticism, contemporary black feminists, like their 19th century counterparts, mobilized for struggle with the hope that eradicating the twin evils of racism and sexism would become a battle cry within the entire community.

Black feminism would come out of the shadows in the nineties and provide useful insights for analyzing not just the situation of black women but important aspects of the broader community as well. It would also move from the margins to the center of mainstream feminist discourse just as Anita Hill had provided a shot in the arm for the women's movement in the '90s. Patricia Hill Collins' ground-breaking theoretical analysis *black Feminist Thought* (1990), a major text for understanding contemporary black feminism, identifies four of its core themes argues that the fusion of activism and theory is its distinguishing characteristic. These themes include the interlocking nature of race, class, and gender oppression in black women's personal, domestic and work lives; the need for black women to internalize positive self-definitions and reject the denigrating, stereotypical, and controlling images (mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, whore) of others, both within and without the black community; and the need for active struggle among black women in order to resist oppression and realize individual and group empowerment. This text would establish, along with Hooks' *Ain't I A Woman* published a decade earlier, the existence of a strong black feminist intellectual tradition going back to the publication of Cooper's *A Voice from the South* a hundred years earlier.

An analysis of the evolution of black feminism in the U.S. illustrates that neither race nor gender alone can explain the complexity of the black female experience so that black women must fight on two fronts. The best of black womanhood was believed to be embodied in the likes of Sojourner Truth whose battle in the 19th century against race and gender inequality would inspire generations yet unborn to make the world better for Black women. The struggle continues.

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